半蔵の門 PATH OF THE ASSASSIN

VOLUME 10

BATTLE FOR POWER PART TWO

By KAZUO KOIKE & GOSEKI KOJIMA

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Lifelong Friends, with the Same Dreams,
Striving to Grow into a Rising River.

DARK HORSE MANGA™

半蔵の門 PATH OF THE ASSASSIN

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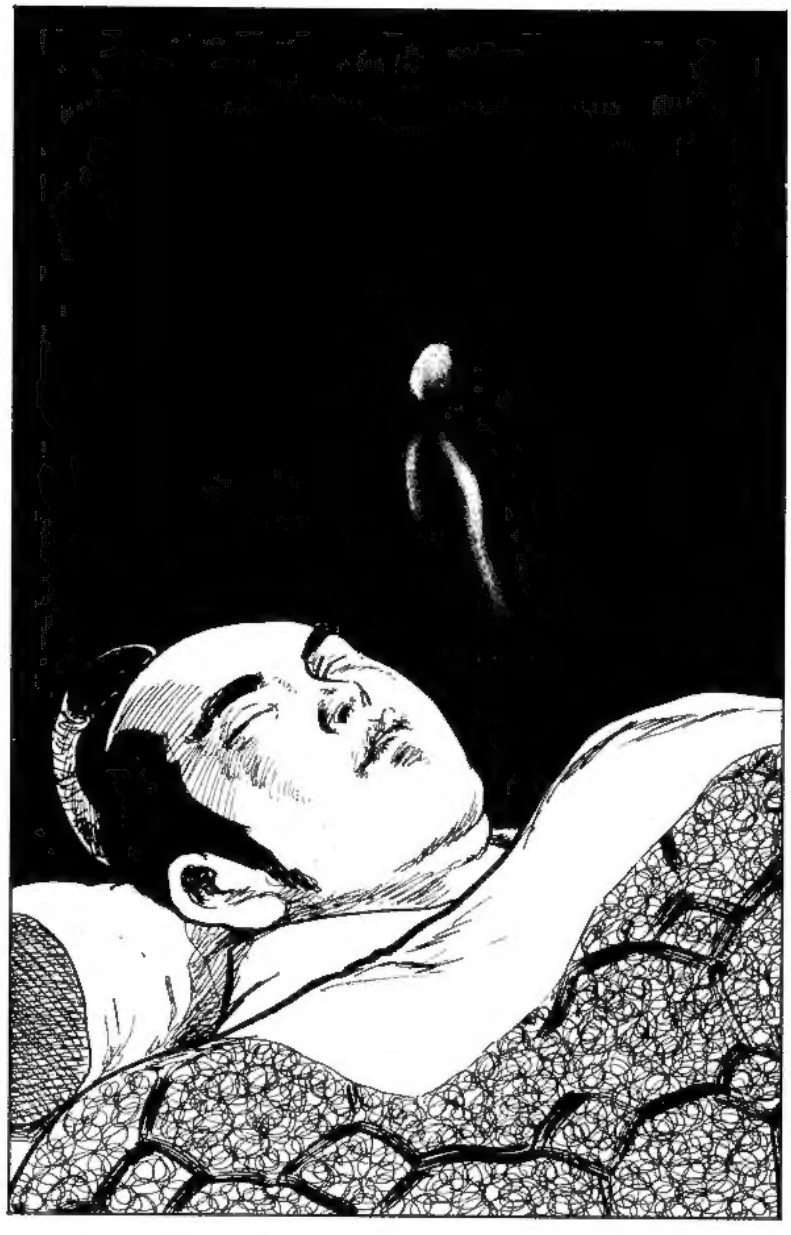
Chapter On Tenka Fubu No. 1: Battle for Power (Part 2)



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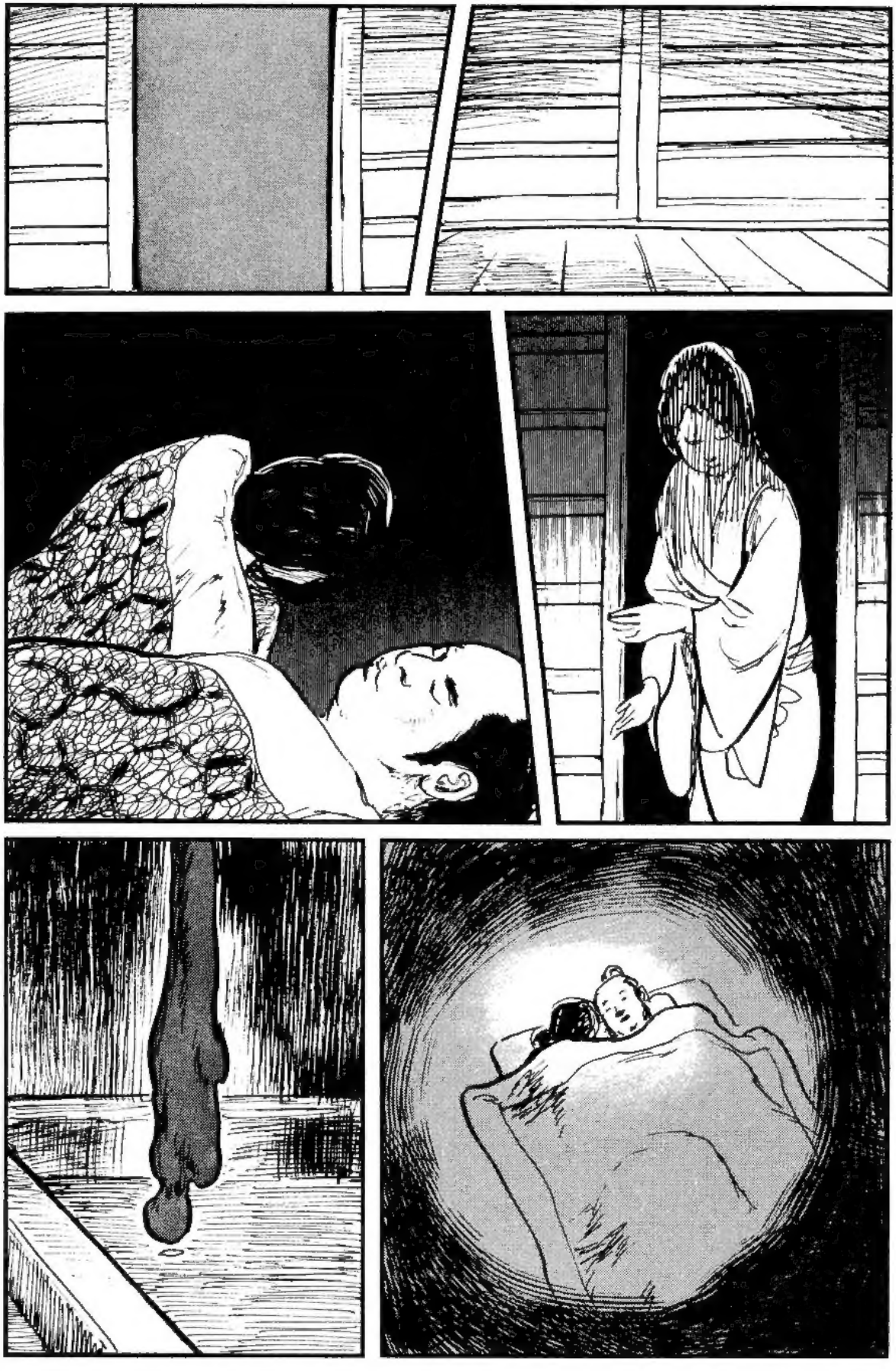

UR...
MMM!
I'D BETTER NOT DAWDLE. I MUST TAKE SURUGA FROM UJIZANE...
I DREAMT JUST NOW. WHAT LOOKED LIKE KYOTO WAS GOING UP IN FLAMES. NOBUNAGA-*DONO* WAS ATTACKING IT...

OOPS...
Y...YOU ARE...
M...MILK CAME OUT!
ULP...
TSU... TSUKUMO!

YOU'D BE HARD-PRESSED TO FIND A *SUPPA* WHO HASN'T HEARD OF THIS DIABOLICAL MAN, THE ROGUE HACHIYA...
HE...HE IS A MAN OF *AYAKASHI*... HE USES BIZARRE PUPPETS.
HE IS AFTER MY LIFE?
HACHIYA SEKIUN ?!
I...I APOLOGIZE.
AND THAT'S WHY YOU...

Y... YES?
TSU-KUMO.
I...MY HUSBAND TOLD ME TO LET YOU KNOW WHO I WAS IF YOU DID.
WHAT IF YOUR MILK HADN'T COME AND I STARTED MAKING LOVE TO YOU? WHAT WOULD YOU HAVE DONE?
ALL RIGHT.

IF THAT WASN'T THE PLAN, I WOULD'VE *PUNCHED* HANZŌ AND DISMISSED HIM.
URNG. BUT I DID TASTE YOUR MILK! I HAVE TO WHACK HIM AT LEAST ONCE. OTHERWISE, I CAN'T FORGIVE HIM!

WHOA
WOW
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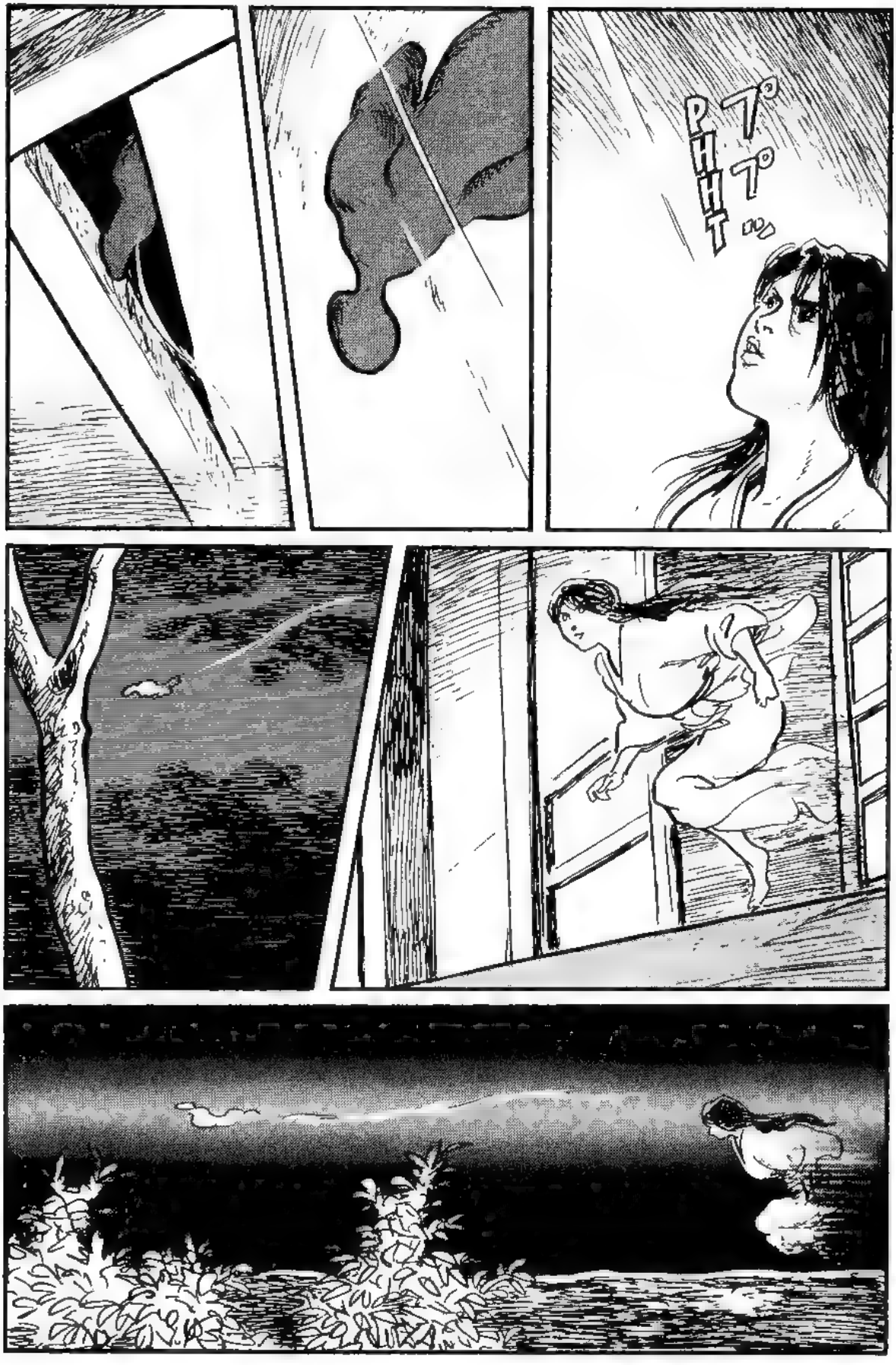
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WHA... WHAT THE HELL...WAS THAT?!

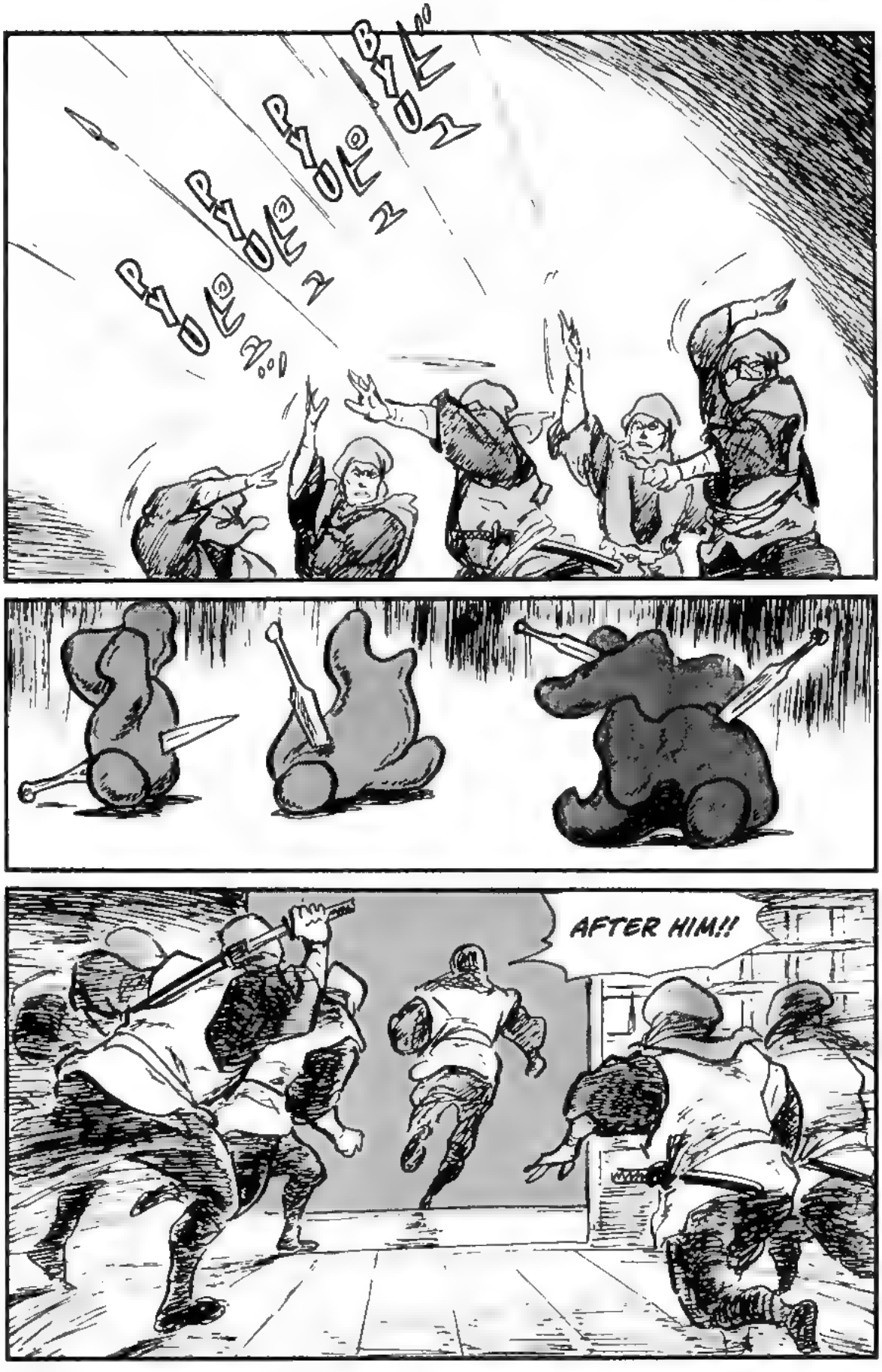
WHOA!!

I WILL TAKE YOUR LIFE. TAKEDA SHINGEN ORDERED ME TO!

A MERE DOLL CAN'T LURE US AWAY!
YOU BLEW IT, HACHIYA SEKIUN.
HANZŌ, THE BEST OF IGA!
WHOOSH
TSUKUMO WAS OUR DECOY! WE SPLIT INTO TWO GROUPS FROM THE BEGINNING--SOME TO FOLLOW YOUR PUPPET AND SOME TO LIE IN WAIT.

YEAH? HOW MANY WAYS WILL YOU SPLIT THIS TIME?
HAH

I AM THE BROTHER OF HACHIYA SEKINEN, WHO RULED THE IMAGAWA *NOKIZARU*.
LISTEN, HANZŌ. I'VE LOOKED FORWARD TO FACING YOU IN PERSON.
I WILL AVENGE HIM!
I MAY BE A WAYWARD BROTHER, BUT WE WERE STILL FAMILY.

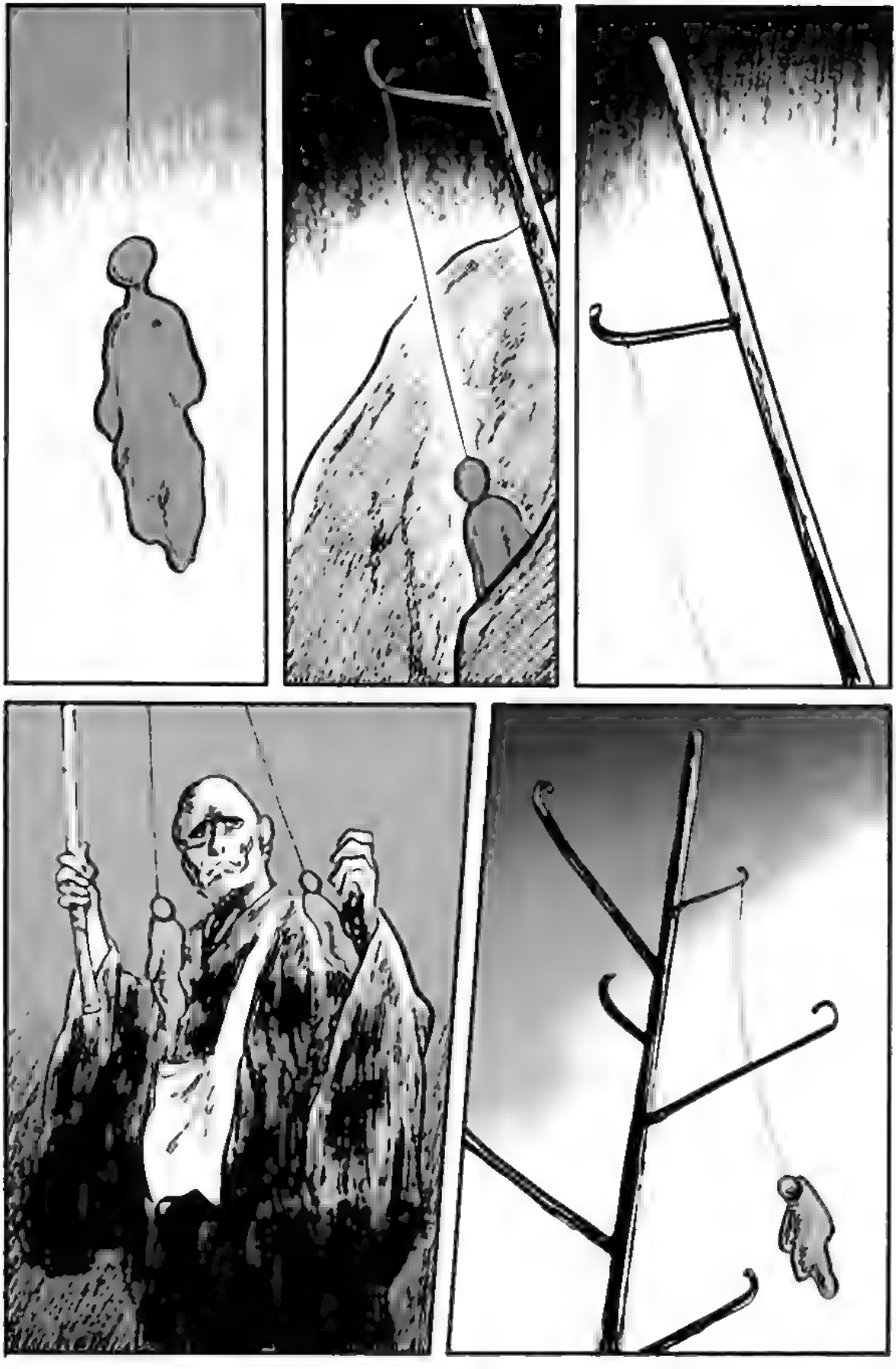

AFTER HIM!!

THE LIGHTS!

URRG!

SEKIUN! THE ERA IN WHICH A SUPRA COULD FORCE HIS WILL UPON THE WORLD IS GONE.
SO THERE ARE TWO, AS I THOUGHT.
THIS IS A TIME OF COLLECTIVE POWER, NOT THE INDIVIDUAL.
URG...

INDEED.
THE TIME OF COLLECTIVE POWER, NOT THE INDIVIDUAL...



YOU SURELY ARE THE BEST OF IGA, HANZŌ.
MY PUPPETS ARE USELESS IN LIGHT ANY BRIGHTER THAN THE MOON.

IN THESE DAYS WHEN *SUPPA* ARE DISAPPEARING ONE AFTER ANOTHER, YOU STILL LEAD MANY. SURELY THERE ARE OCCASIONS WHEN YOU MUST FIGHT SOMEONE FACE-TO-FACE. IT'S YOUR FATE.
FIGHT ME, HANZŌ.
BOW

OTHERWISE YOU'D HAVE A DISORDERLY MOB.
AS A LEADER YOU MUST BE FORCED TO DEMONSTRATE YOUR POWER AND WIN THE TRUST OF YOUR MEN, I IMAGINE.
KILL THEM!
I AM NOT THE ONE WHO'S LEADING THE PACK. WE CAME TOGETHER UNDER THE CLAN TOKUGAWA, AND WE WORK TOGETHER FOR OUR MASTER, IEYASU.
YOUR WORDS ARE POINTLESS.

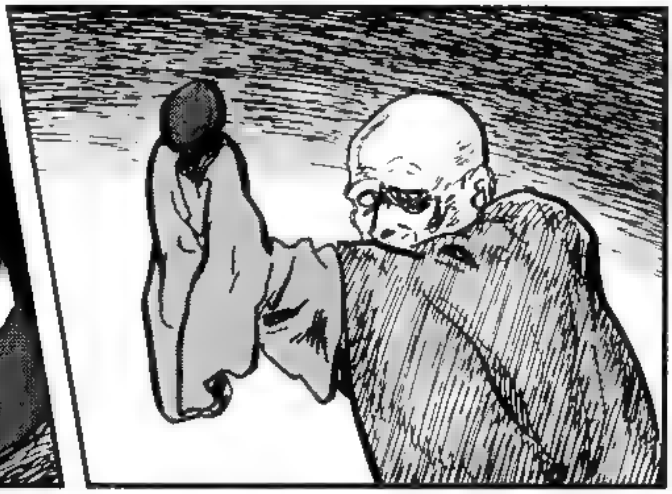
YOU ARE OLD-FASHIONED, SEKIUN. LEADING MANY BY THE POWER OF ONE INDIVIDUAL. THAT BELONGS TO THE FADING PAST. DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND?
THERE WAS AN AGE IN WHICH MEN DID NOT FOLLOW THEIR LEADER UNLESS HE DEMONSTRATED HIS STRENGTH, BUT THAT TIME IS ABOUT TO END.
IF YOU DO, I'LL GIVE YOU THIS WOMAN.
PLEASE FIGHT ME, HANZŌ.

I STOLE HER WHEN I LEFT HACHIYA. SHE'S A BLOOD DESCENDANT OF THE DARK MIKO WHO RULES THE HACHIYA FOLK.
SHE'S NOT JUST ANY WOMAN.
NONE OF THE HACHIYA COULD HUNT ME BECAUSE OF HER.
PERHAPS I AM ONLY A WAYWARD HACHIYA, BUT I'M STILL ALIVE TODAY BECAUSE SHE'S WITH ME.
THEY KNOW I'D KILL HER THE MOMENT THEY ATTACKED.
IF YOU OWNED HER, AND IF YOU MADE THE RIGHT MOVES, YOU COULD GET ALL OF HACHIYA UNDER IGA'S CONTROL!

KILL THEM BOTH!
HER NAME IS NUME.
I...I WANT TO FIGHT ONE SUPPA AS AN INDIVIDUAL!

ONLY THEN WILL I HAVE NO REGRETS, EVEN IF I LOSE. DON'T LET THAT MOB TORTURE ME TO DEATH!
I WANT TO DUEL, USING EVERY TECHNIQUE I HAVE AGAINST A RENOWNED OPPONENT!
ALL YOU WANT IS TO SEND ME TO MY GRAVE. THAT'S WHY YOU KEEP TALKING.
I KNOW WHAT YOU'RE AFTER.
I BEG YOU, HANZŌ! PLEASE FIGHT ME!
I AM TSUKUMO, YAMAMOTO KANSUKE'S BLOOD AND HANZŌ'S WIFE!

AND IN RETURN, NUME WILL BE OURS. UNDERSTOOD?!
I'LL FIGHT YOU.
I'LL FIGHT YOU, SEKIUN.



ZA ZAAA

カイアンガイガー
SHINNG
THE PUP-PET !!

FORGIVE ME...
NUME...

CHOK
CHOK
CHOK

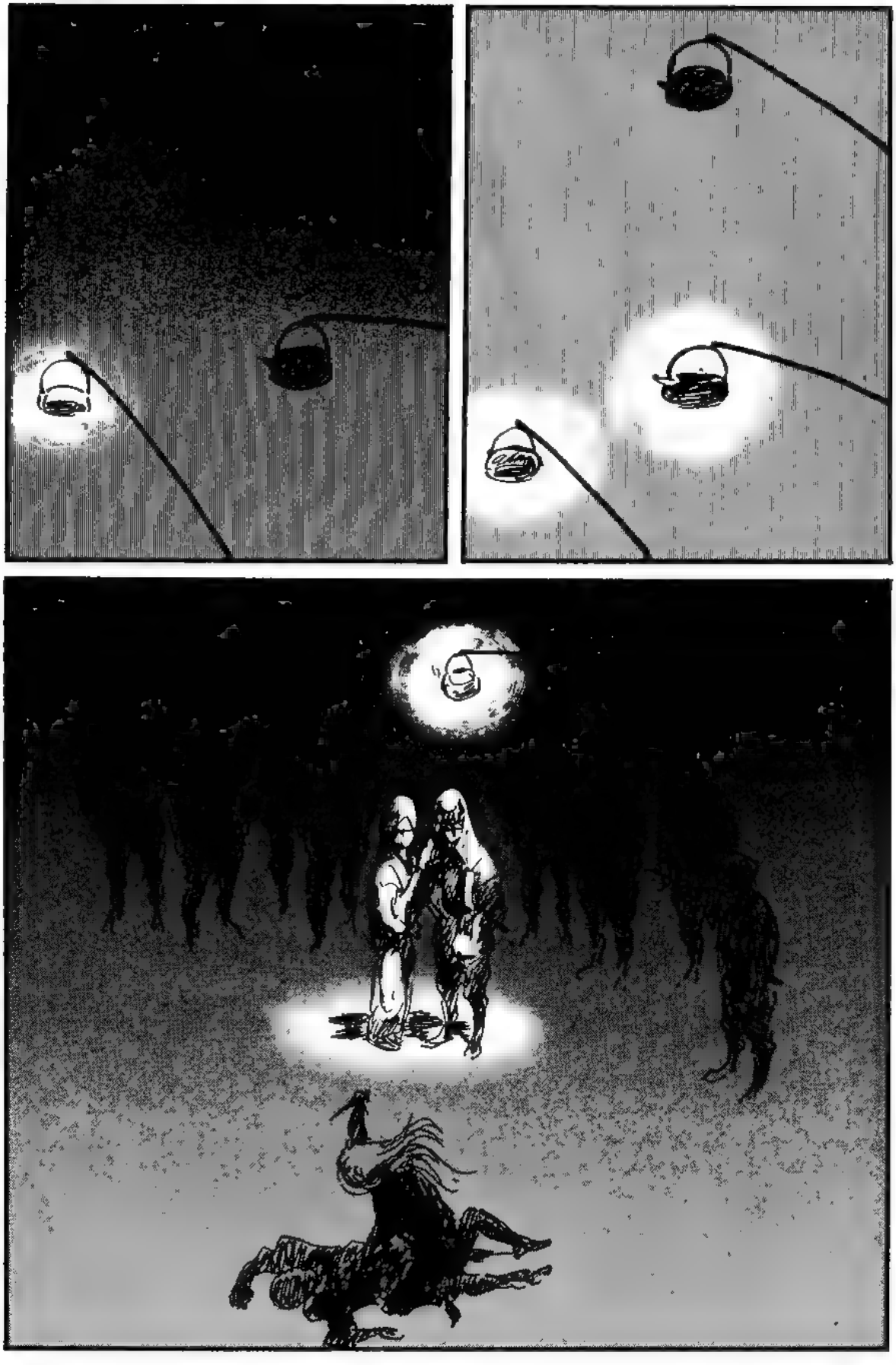
SPLOCH
IT WAS A SAD SCENE.

NUME STABBED AND CUT UP SEKIUN. HER BEHAVIOR REVEALED WHAT THEIR LIFE TOGETHER HAD BEEN LIKE, AND MUCH MORE.

BEFORE HE DIED, SEKIUN SAID HE STOLE HER AWAY FOR HIS OWN PROTECTION.
HACHIYA SEKIUN AND NUME, A DARK MIKO
NUME MUST'VE BEEN A CHILD WHEN SHE WAS KIDNAPPED. AS SHE GREW UP, WHAT DID HE DO TO HER?

THE SIGHT WAS TOO PITIFUL AND CRUEL FOR ANYONE TO STOP HER.
THROUGH HER ACTIONS, SHE EXPOSED WHAT SHE HAD SURVIVED.

HANZŌ, TSUKUMO AND THE *IGAMONO* STOOD FROZEN. THEY COULD ONLY WATCH. AND THEY SHARED HOW SHE FELT.

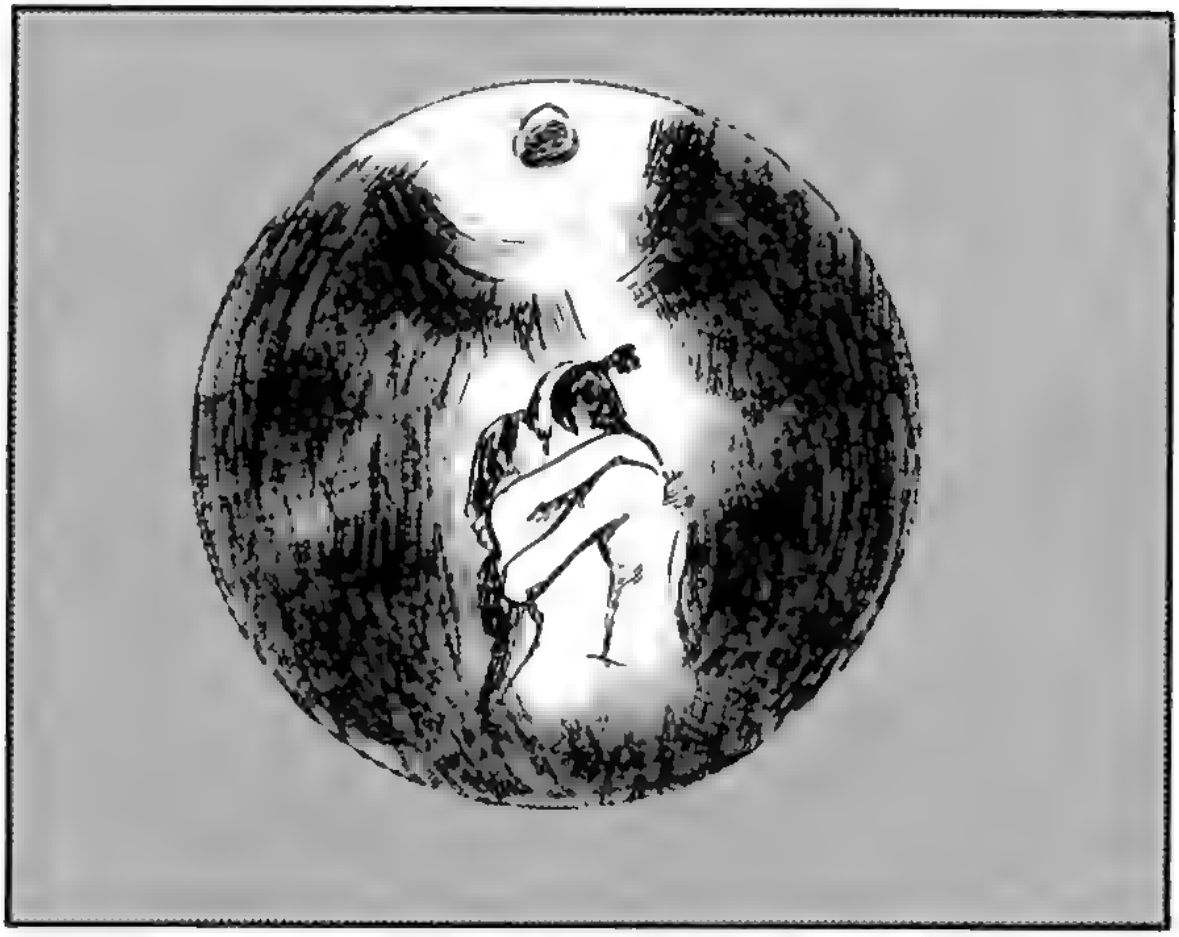


GO!!

LEAVE HER ALONE UNTIL SHE'S SATISFIED. SHE'S TRYING TO BREAK FREE OF HER VILE PAST.
IF SHE STOPS HALFWAY, SHE'LL STAY TRAPPED IN HER MISERY FOR-EVER.

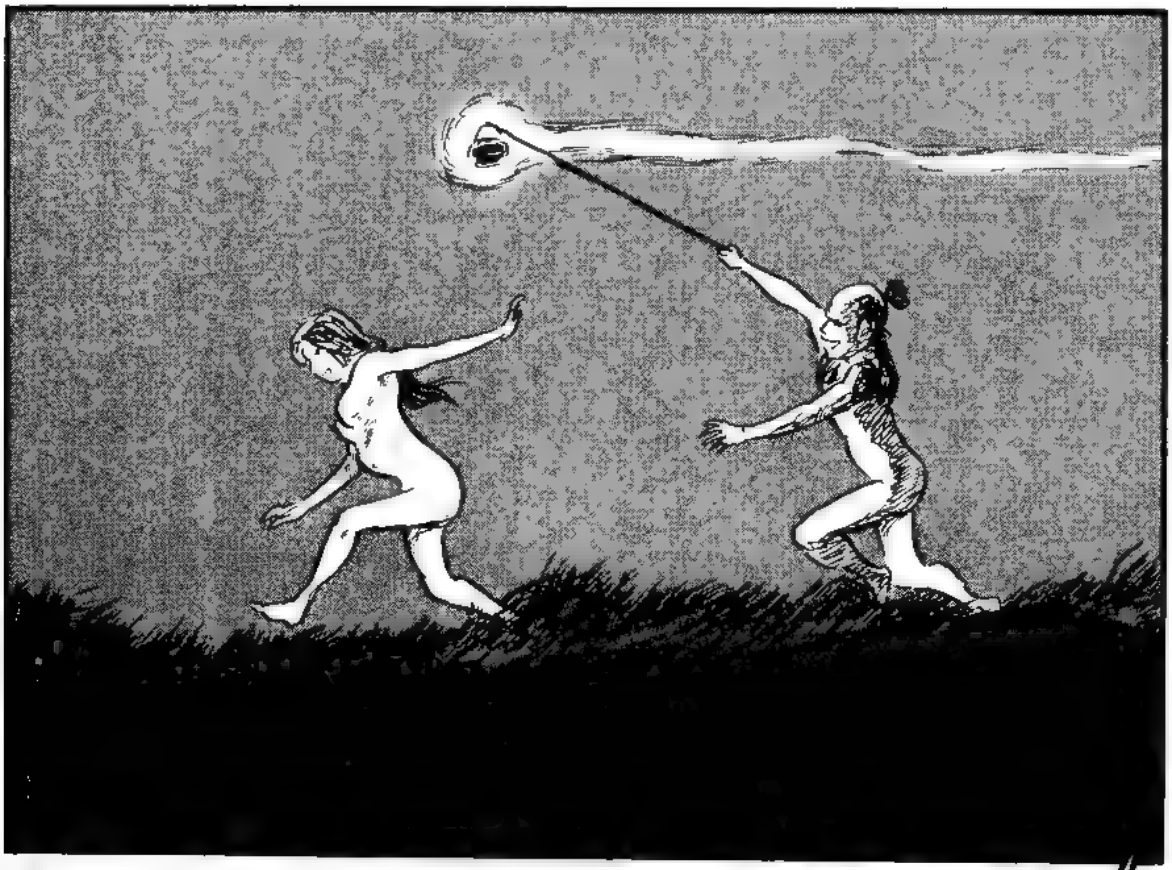
WAHHHH

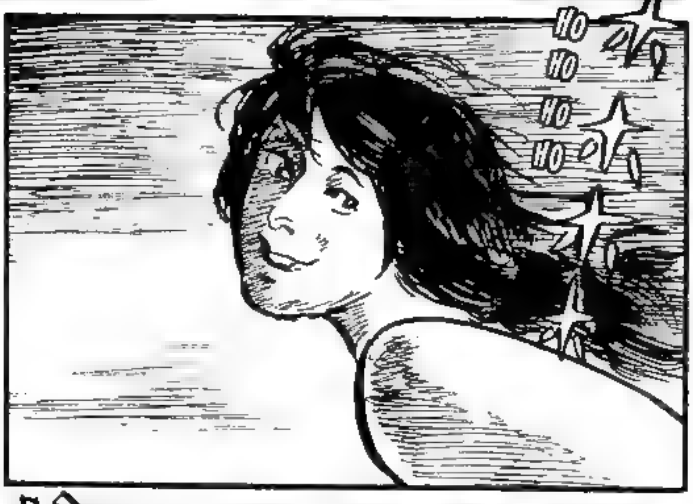
OTHERWISE SHE'LL RIP HERSELF APART AS SHE STRUGGLES WITH EVERY WILD EMOTION.
SHE NEEDS TO KNOW HOW BEAUTIFUL IT CAN BE.
WE MUST SHOW HER...
...HOW WONDERFUL LOVE IS, RIGHT NOW.
Y... YES.
TSU-KUMO.



AAHH

DARLING.
AHHH, IT'S GOOD.
AAHH!
AHHH, GOOD. IT'S GOOD.




HO
HO
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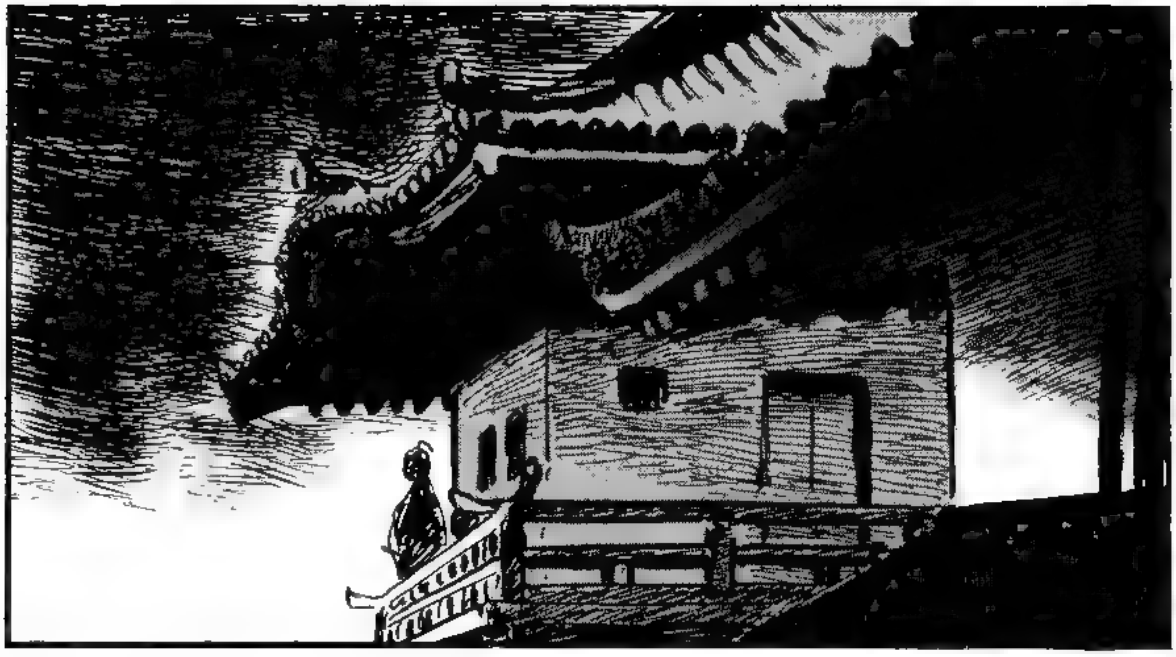
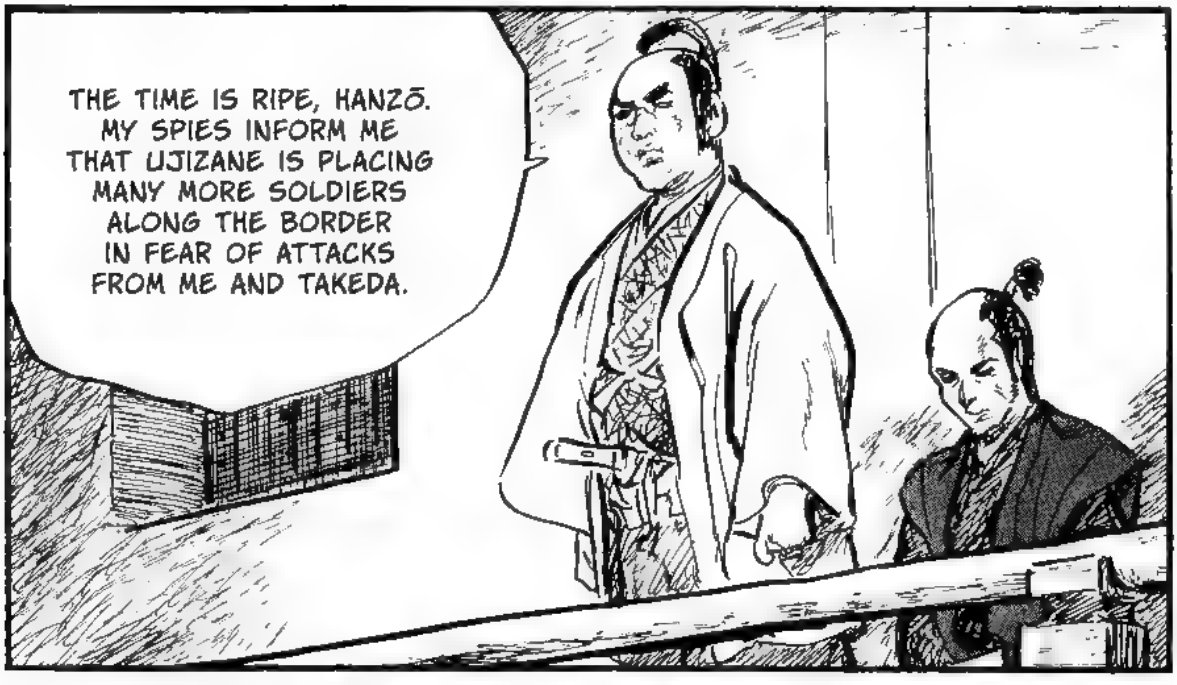
NOW, COME WITH US. YOU WILL EAT AND SLEEP. DON'T THINK ABOUT ANYTHING ELSE.
FORGET EVERYTHING. FORGET YOURSELF. YOUR NEW LIFE WILL START WHEN YOU WAKE IN THE MORNING.




THE TIME IS RIPE, HANZŌ. MY SPIES INFORM ME THAT UJIZANE IS PLACING MANY MORE SOLDIERS ALONG THE BORDER IN FEAR OF ATTACKS FROM ME AND TAKEDA.

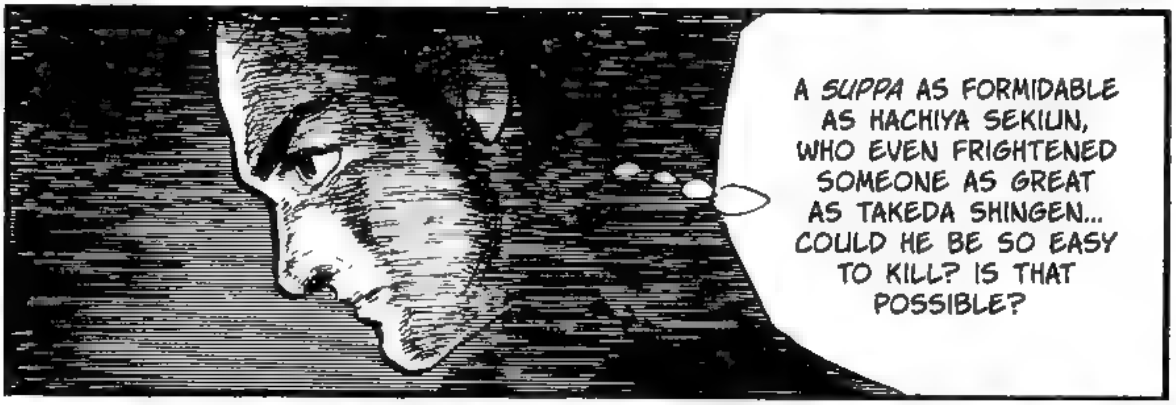
IT ONLY WEAKENS THEM TO SCATTER THEIR TROOPS ACROSS SUCH AN EXTENSIVE BORDER. IT MAKES IT EASY TO ATTACK SUNPU FROM ANYWHERE.
HE'S SO STUPID. IF HE KEPT HIS MEN TOGETHER AND STAYED READY TO DEPLOY THEM ANYPLACE, ANYTIME, THEY'D BE HARD TO BEAT. IMAGAWA MAY BE ROTTING, BUT IT'S STILL A FIGHTING CARP AFTER ALL.

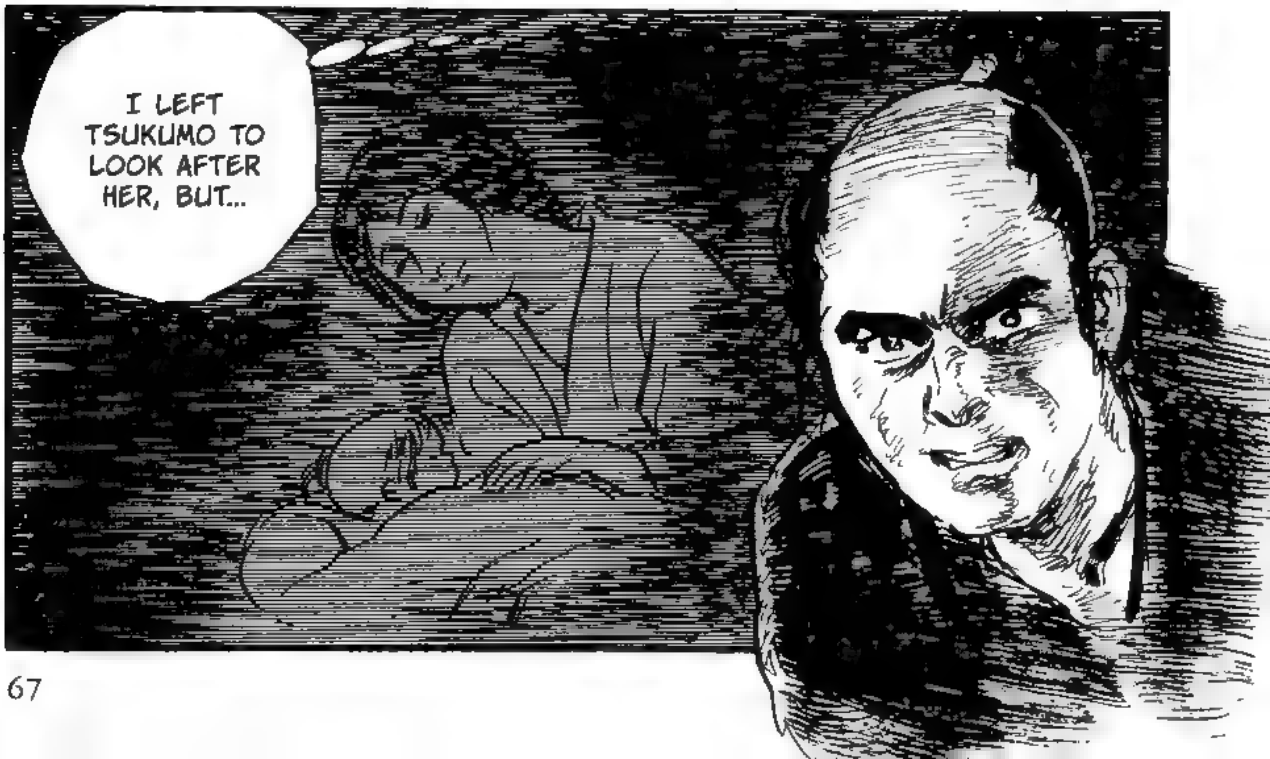
BY THE WAY, I CAN'T HELP THINKING...
YES, SIR!
WE'LL MAKE OUR MOVE BEFORE TAKEDA! LET'S TAKE THE FIELD TOMORROW MORNING!
IF NOBUNAGA-*DONO* BECOMES SHOGUN, YOSHIMOTO-*SAMA* WILL BE REMEMBERED FOREVER ONLY AS THE STEPPING STONE WHO ENABLED NOBUNAGA-*DONO* TO DO SO.
...HOW YOSHIMOTO-*SAMA* BECAME NOBUNAGA-*DONO*'S FRONT MAN AFTER ALL.
NOBUNAGA-*DONO*'S FRONT MAN...
HIS *HŌMYŌ*, *TENTAKUJIDONO SHIHON*, *SAKI-NO-REIBUJIRŌ*, *SUNSHŪ SHISHI*, *SHŪHŌTETSU DAIKOJI*, MUST BE GRIEVING. I WONDER HOW UJIZANE FEELS ABOUT THAT.

THERE'S AN URGENT MATTER I MUST ATTEND TO. EXCUSE ME, SIR.
SHNG

IT CAN'T BE...

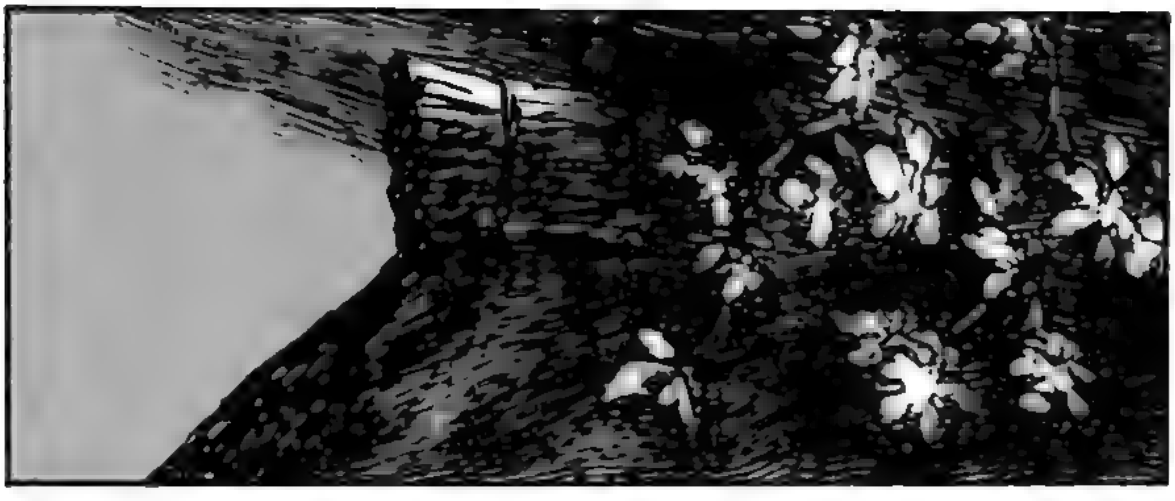
THE WORD "FRONT MAN"... IT BOTHERS ME...

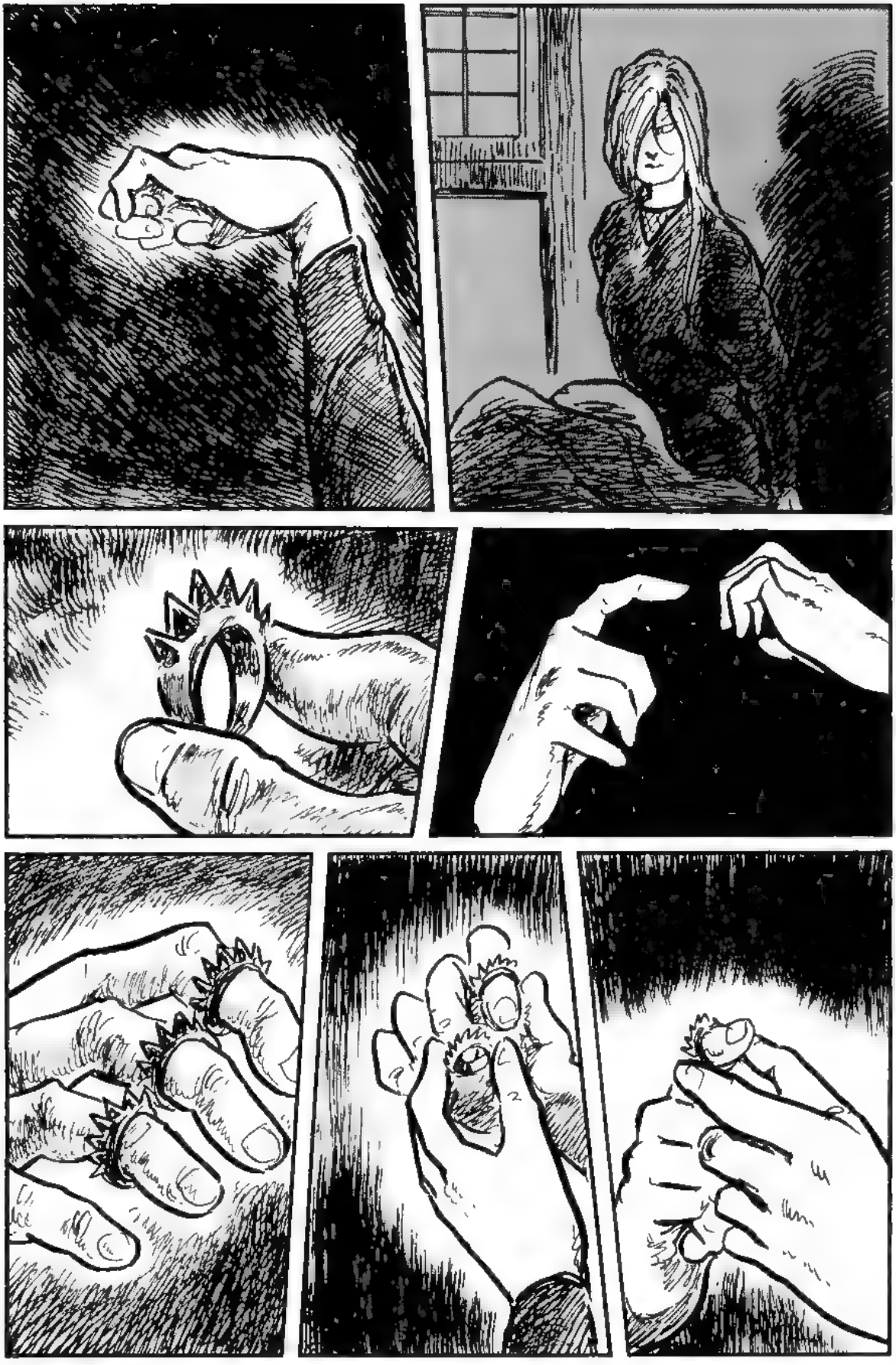

A *SUPPA* AS FORMIDABLE AS HACHIYA SEKIUN, WHO EVEN FRIGHTENED SOMEONE AS GREAT AS TAKEDA SHINGEN... COULD HE BE SO EASY TO KILL? IS THAT POSSIBLE?

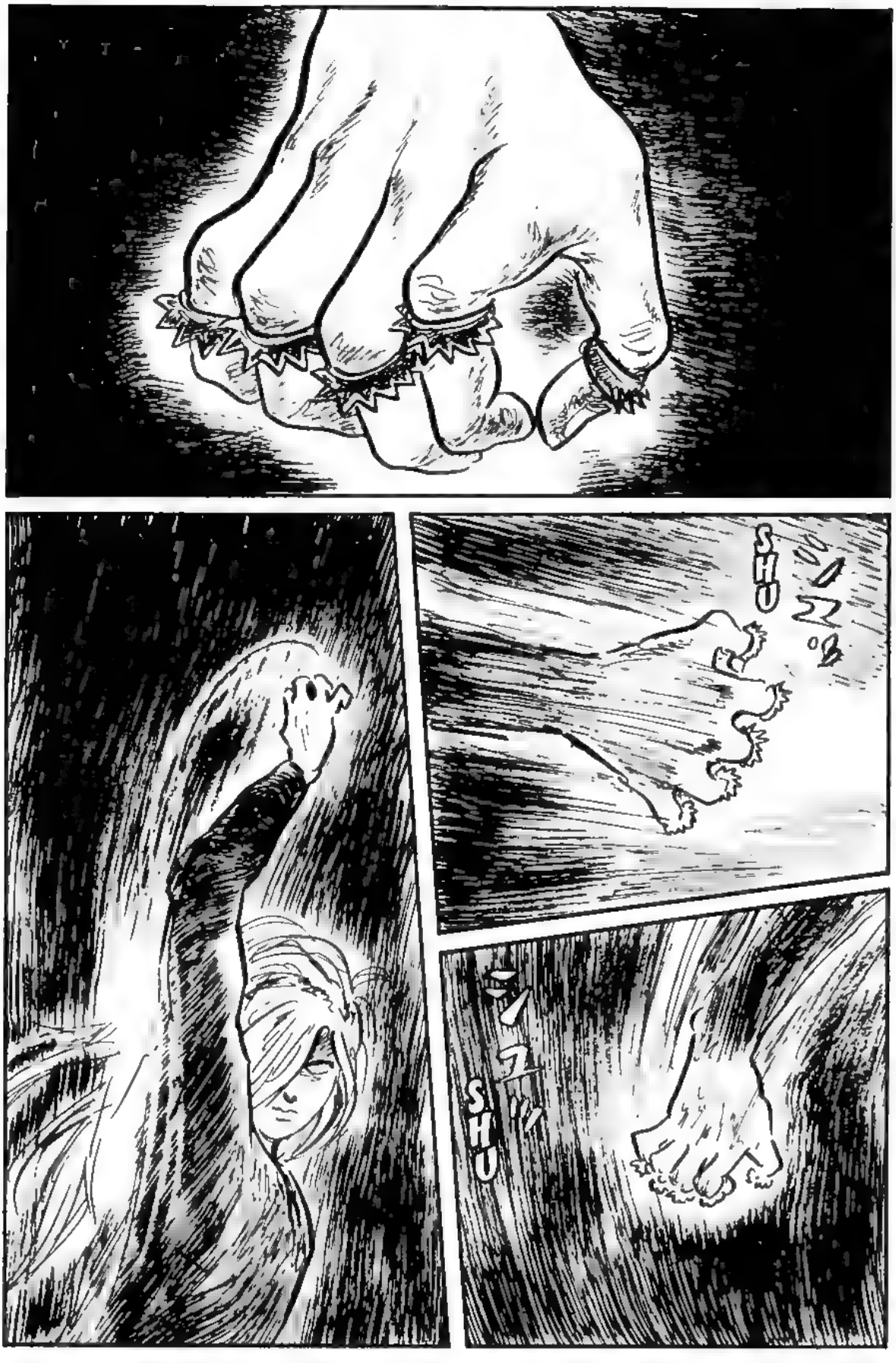

I LEFT TSUKUMO TO LOOK AFTER HER, BUT...

IT ISN'T IMPOSSIBLE!
WHAT IF SEKIUN WAS ONLY A FRONT MAN AND THAT *WOMAN* WAS THE REAL ASSASSIN...
HE IS A PUPPET-EER.
IT'S ENTIRELY PLAUSIBLE!
WHAT IF SHE WAS HIS DISGUISE...
WHAT IF THAT WAS HIS SECRET CARD.
HE MIGHT ALSO USE PEOPLE AS DOLLS...

DAMN!! DID I MAKE A MISTAKE?!



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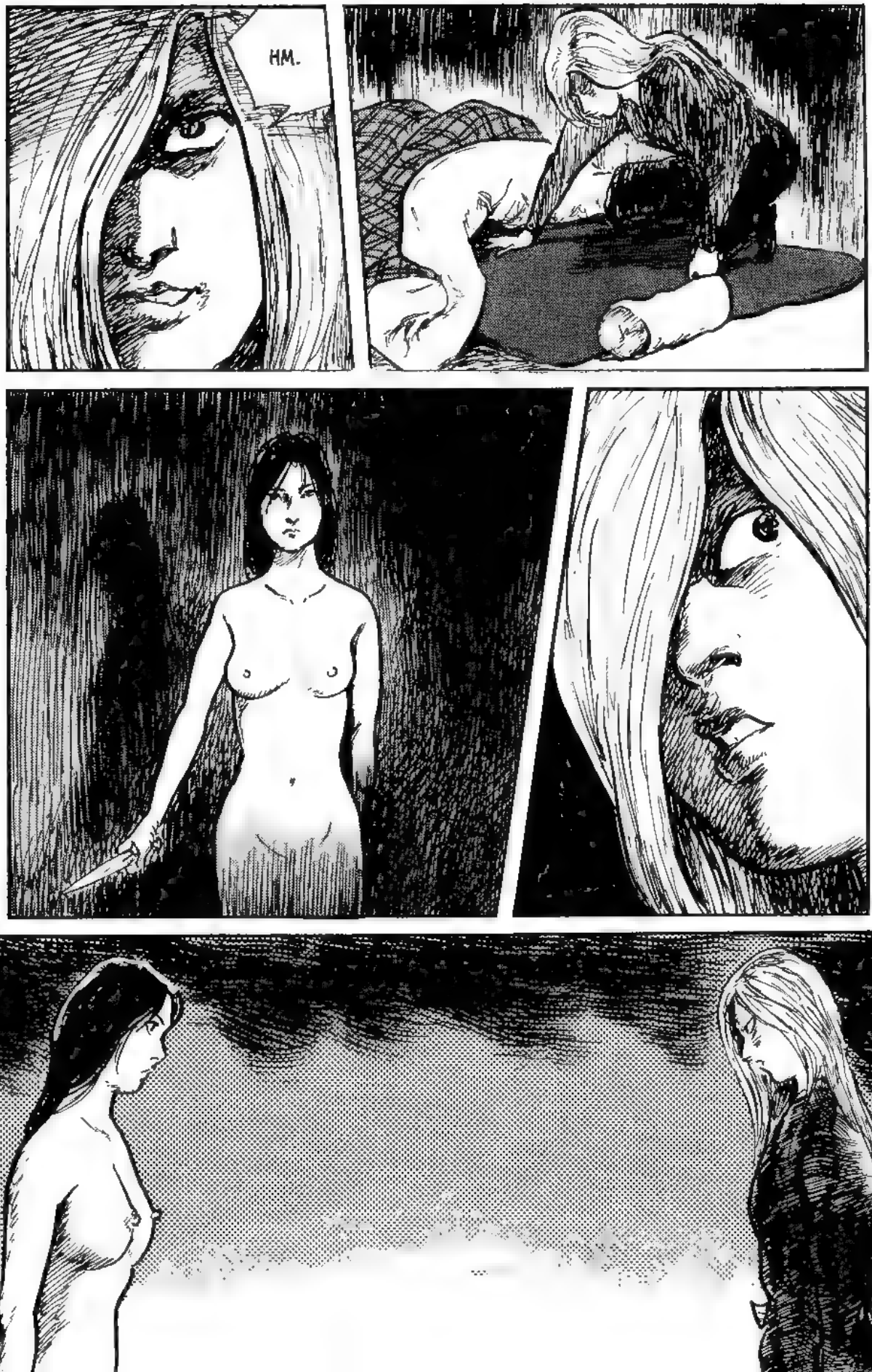
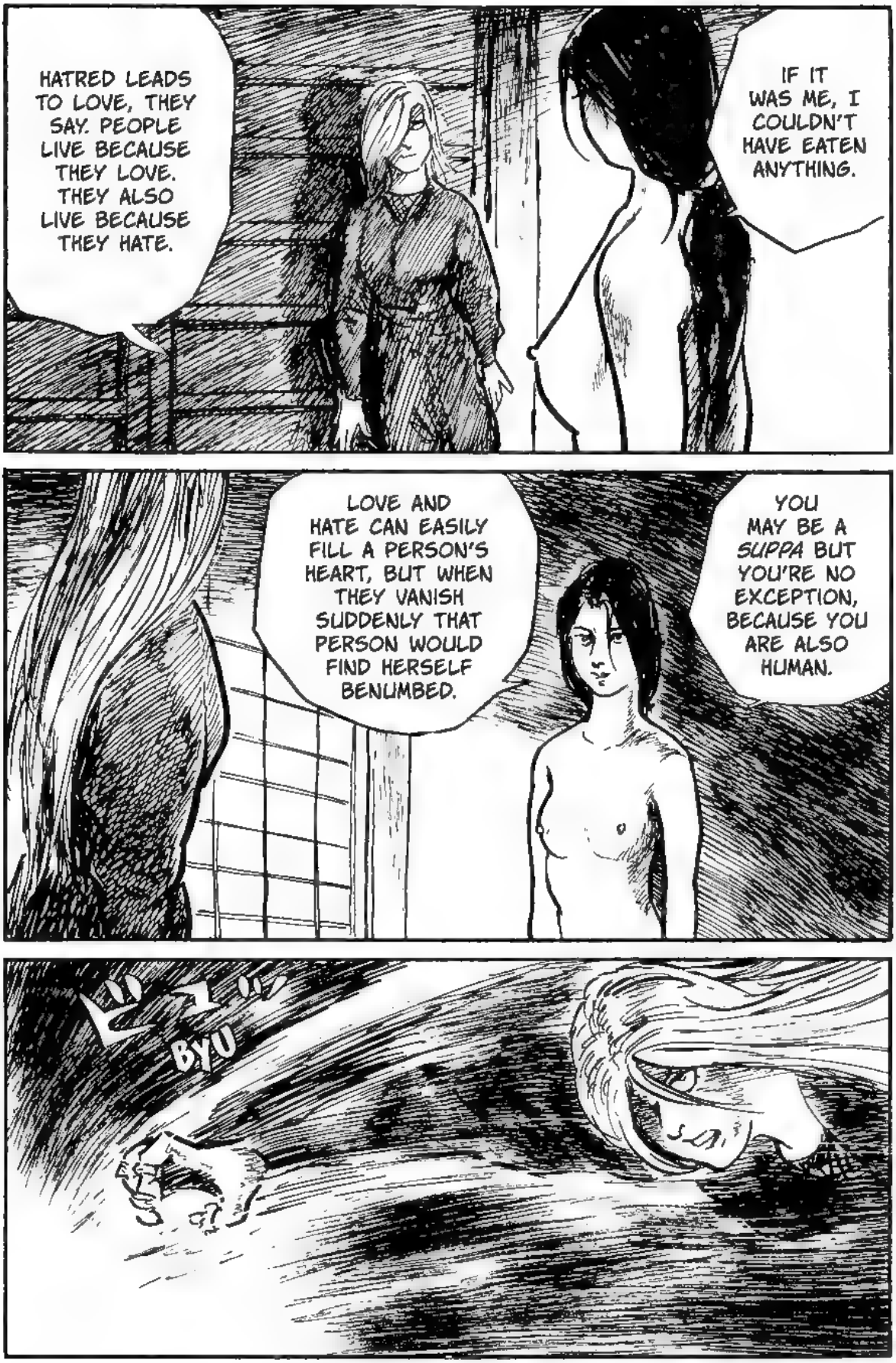
SHU

IF THAT'S THE CASE...

IF SO...
HE USED THIS DECEPTION ONLY BECAUSE HE MEANS TO KILL ME AFTER I LOWER MY GUARD.
NO. KILLING TSUKUMO AND OUR BABY IS POINTLESS. IT WOULD ONLY ENRAGE ME.
IF HE WAS GOING TO HAVE HER FIGHT ME IN THE OPEN, FACE-TO-FACE, SHE WOULD'VE STRUCK RIGHT AFTER I KILLED HIM.
BESIDES, IT'S JUST SPECULA-TION.
WHEW


HM.

HOW DID YOU KNOW?
I KNEW IT.
...YOU ATE GRABBING IT WITH YOUR HANDS LIKE A BEAST.
WHEN WE BROUGHT YOU HERE AND GAVE YOU FOOD...
IF YOU ABHORRED SEKIUN ENOUGH TO SLASH AT HIM LIKE THAT, YOU WOULD'VE BEEN IN A DAZE BY THE TIME WE GOT HERE.
...HOW CAN A BEAST UNDERSTAND LOVE OR HATE.
AS I WATCHED, I WONDERED...


HATRED LEADS TO LOVE, THEY SAY. PEOPLE LIVE BECAUSE THEY LOVE. THEY ALSO LIVE BECAUSE THEY HATE.
IF IT WAS ME, I COULDN'T HAVE EATEN ANYTHING.
LOVE AND HATE CAN EASILY FILL A PERSON'S HEART, BUT WHEN THEY VANISH SUDDENLY THAT PERSON WOULD FIND HERSELF BENUMBED.
YOU MAY BE A *SUPPA* BUT YOU'RE NO EXCEPTION, BECAUSE YOU ARE ALSO HUMAN.
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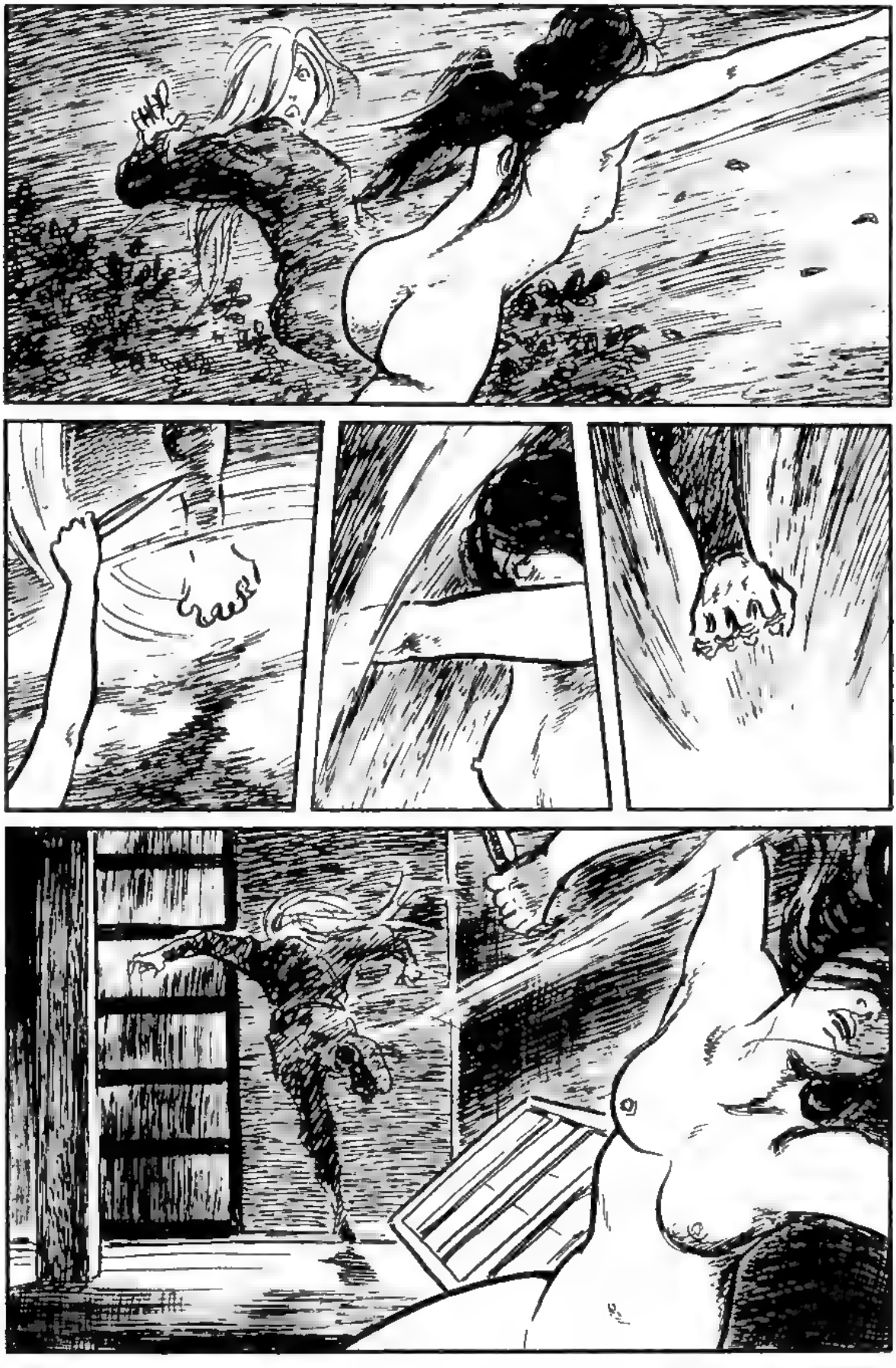


BAM
SHLUCK
SLASH

TO HIDE THEM ALIVE AND FIGHT YOU AFTER-WARD.
WHY DID YOU ATTACK MY WIFE AND BABY?
HEE HEE HEE. YOU WOULD'VE BEEN AT A TOTAL LOSS.
IF YOU KILLED ME, YOU WOULDN'T KNOW WHERE TO FIND THEM, AND THEY'D BE SURE TO DIE.
MM.
YOU WOULD HAVE HAD NO CHOICE BUT TO TAKE MY ORDERS LIKE A PUPPET. HEE HEE HEE! HEE HEE!

MY DAR-LING!
HOW I... ENVY... YOU...
IS THAT... WHAT LOVERS LOOK LIKE...?
YOU...YOU SHONE SO BRIGHT...WHEN YOU RAN AND MADE LOVE...
A HALF AN HOUR LATER... AT DAWN, IEYASU HAD HIS ARMY ON THE WARPATH. IT WAS THE ELEVENTH YEAR OF EIROKU (1568 A.D.), THE YEAR WHEN THE ENTIRE COUNTRY BEGAN TO MOVE TOWARD THE BATTLE FOR POWER.
I PITY HER...

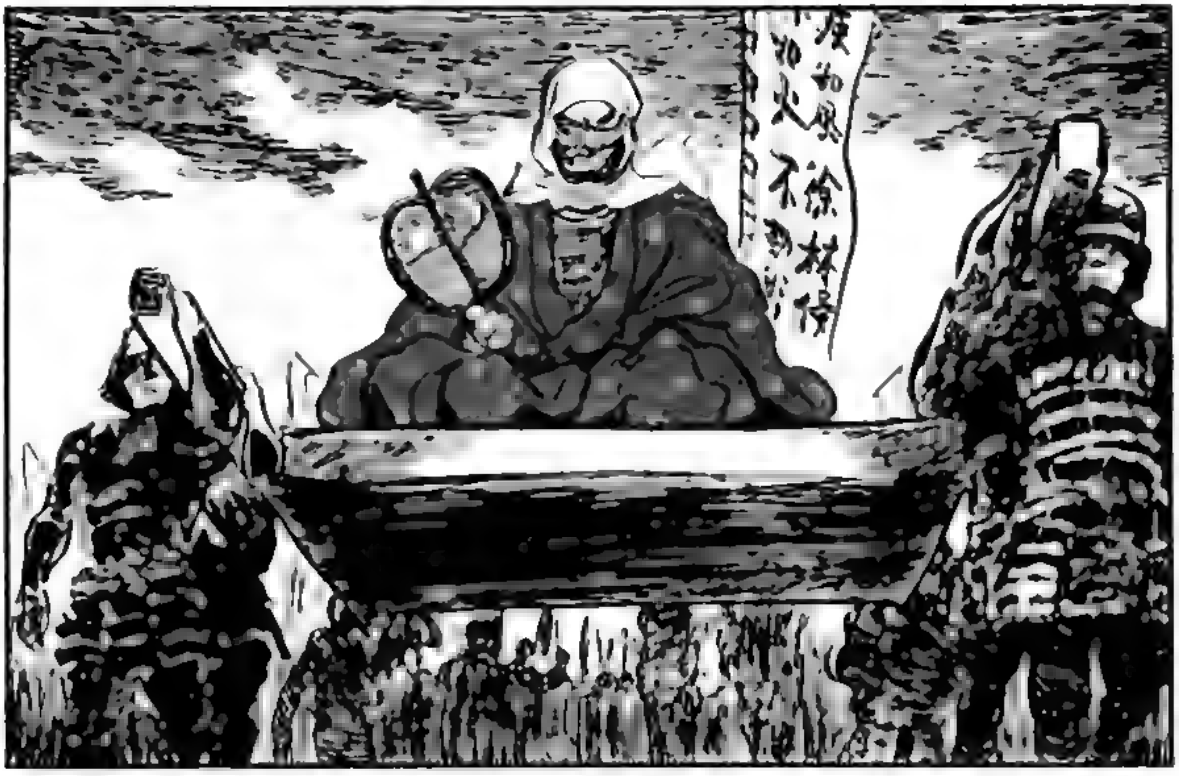
THAT DAY, IN THE ELEVENTH YEAR OF EIROKU (1568 A.D.), IEYASU INVADED FROM THE WEST TO TAKE IMAGAWA UJIZANE BY STORM.

BUT THERE WAS ONE THING THAT WORRIED HIM. IT WAS THE ACTION OF TAKEDA SHINGEN.

TAKEDA SHINGEN WAS ALREADY HEADING SOUTH FROM KŌFU TOWARD SURUGA.

HE BROUGHT OVER THREE THOUSAND TAKEDA CAVALRY MEN, WHO WERE FEARED AS INVINCIBLE, WITH SIXTY THOUSAND FOOT SOLDIERS TAKING UP THE REAR.

FLAG
MOVE AS
SWIFT AS
A WIND
STAY AS
SILENT AS
A FOREST
ATTACK AS
FIERCE
AS FIRE
DEFEND AS
UNMOVABLE
AS A
MOUNTAIN

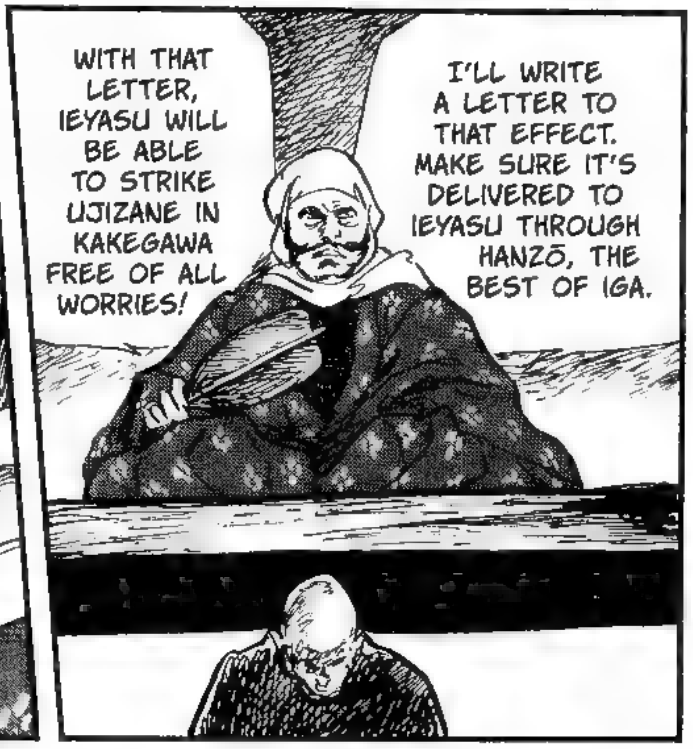


IEYASU IS ON THE MOVE, SIR.
YES SIR.
THAT YOU, MOZU?
HM. THAT'S FAST.

DO YOU THINK IEYASU WILL JUMP AT THE BAIT?
IF HE DOES, LET IEYASU STRIKE KAKEGAWA. WE'LL ATTACK IMAGAWA AFTER IEYASU WEAKENS THEM.
ONCE WE BEGIN OUR ASSAULT, I BET UJIZANE WILL FLEE TO KAKEGAWA.
BUT WE'LL INVADE SURUGA BEFORE HE DOES.
TELL HIM I'M LEADING OVER TEN THOUSAND MEN AND ABOUT TO LAUNCH MY ATTACK. HE'LL THINK HE HAS BETTER PROSPECTS FIGHTING IEYASU THAN ME.
FIRST LET'S SHAKE UP UJIZANE.
HE WILL CONCLUDE THAT THE ROUTE FOR HIS SURVIVAL IS TO THE SOUTH OF ŌI RIVER.
LISTEN, MOZU! I GIVE YOU TWO STRATEGIES. MOBILIZE EVERY *SAISAKU* UNDER YOUR CONTROL AND GET THIS DONE!
YES SIR!

NOW, THE SECOND STRATEGY IS TO MAKE IEYASU ACT THE WAY I WANT. ALL YOU NEED TO TELL HIM IS THAT WE'LL GIVE HIM THE LAND BEYOND ŌI RIVER.
IF UJIZANE RUNS, I CAN GRAB SUNPU WITHOUT WASTING ANY EFFORT.
HE HAS KNOWN IEYASU SINCE CHILDHOOD. JUST AS WATER FLOWS FROM A HIGHER PLAIN TO A LOWER ONE, A COWARD MOVES CLOSER TO WHAT APPEARS SAFER.

TELL HANZŌ TO THINK OF THE FUTURE.
HEH HEH HEH HEH HEH HEH.


WITH THAT LETTER, IEYASU WILL BE ABLE TO STRIKE UJIZANE IN KAKEGAWA FREE OF ALL WORRIES!
I'LL WRITE A LETTER TO THAT EFFECT. MAKE SURE IT'S DELIVERED TO IEYASU THROUGH HANZŌ, THE BEST OF IGA.

GO!
YES SIR!
TELL HIM HIS FATHER IN KAI SAID SO.
WELL, TSUKUMO IS OF MY BLOOD AFTER ALL.
I WISH I COULD HAVE HANZŌ AND TSUKUMO ON MY SIDE SOMEHOW. MY HEART YEARNS FOR THAT EVEN MORE THAN THE IDEA OF BECOMING SHOGUN. I WONDER WHY.

ZA
ZA
ZA
ZA
КУАННННН

MMPF.
UGH.

AMONG THOSE CLOSE TO SHINGEN-SAMA, THERE IS A SHINOBI CALLED MOZU, WHO IS ALSO KNOWN AS UMEBOSHI. HE'S KNOWN TO HANG A DEAD WOMAN IN A TREE WHEN HE WANTS TO GET IN TOUCH WITH ANOTHER SUPPA.
IT'S PROBABLY A TAKEDA SUPPA.
WHAT THE ...?
PLEASE GO ON AHEAD. I WILL MEET HIM HERE AND CATCH UP TO YOU LATER.
THEY SAY IT'S A CRUEL METHOD, BEFITTING HIS NAME, MOZU.
YES SIR.
I DO NOT LIKE SUCH A MAN. BE EXTRA CAREFUL!

YOU ARE A KIND SOUL, HANZŌ, THE BEST OF IGA.

A MAN MAY END UP BLOCKING THE PATH OF ANOTHER AT TIMES, BUT USING ANOTHER AS A TOOL TO SERVE HIS OWN PURPOSE IS UNPARDONABLE.
A MAN HAS A PATH, AND A TOOL HAS A USE.
WE'VE HEARD ABOUT EACH OTHER, BUT THIS IS THE FIRST TIME WE MEET.

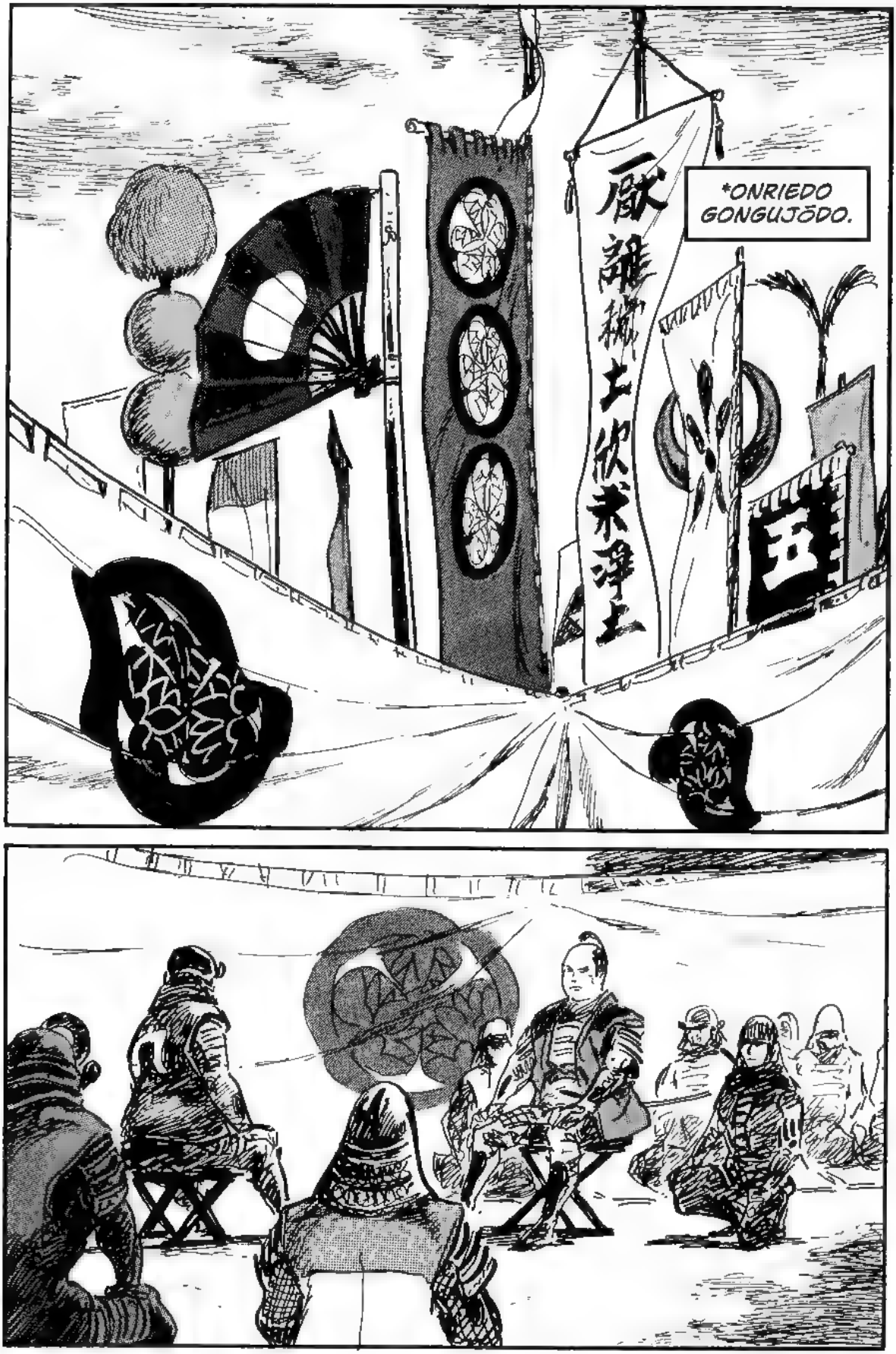
YOU ARE A KIND-HEARTED MAN, INDEED, HANZŌ.
THAT IS DISGUST-ING!
KILLING A WOMAN, HANGING HER CORPSE ON A BRANCH JUST TO USE HER AS YOUR MARK.

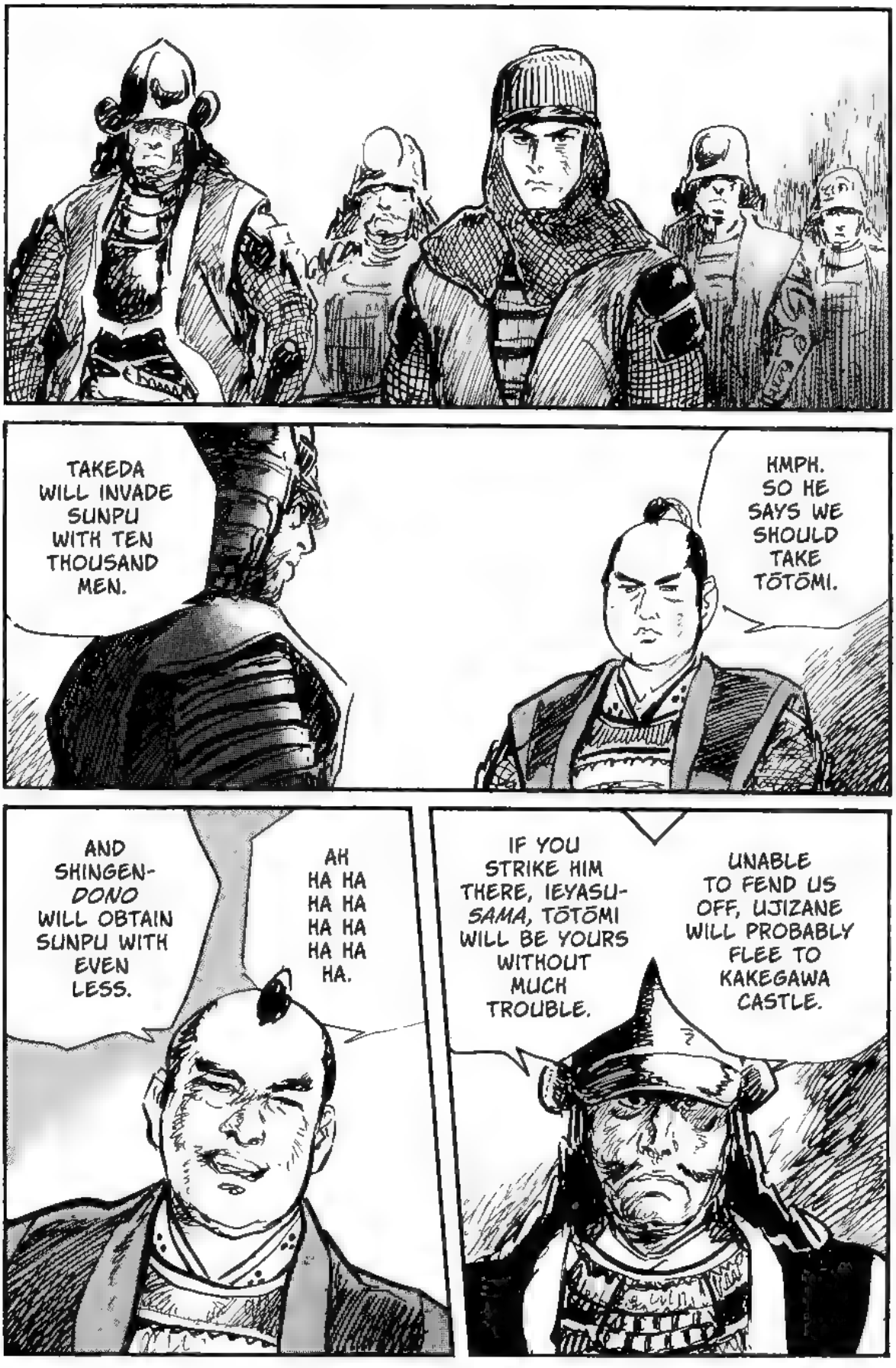
THE DEAD BODY DIDN'T HAVE A SCRATCH EVEN AFTER IT WAS DRAGGED UP THE TREE.
....
WHETHER IT'S RUNNING OR JUMPING, HE'S PROBABLY BETTER THAN I AM.

IF WE SPRANG AT EACH OTHER, I WOULD LOSE. IT'LL BE THE SAME WITH RUNNING.
THAT MEANS HE LEAPED THAT HIGH WITH HER ON HIS SHOULDER...
I BRING SHINGEN-SAMA'S WORDS, SO RELAY THEM TO IEYASU-SAMA.
NOT NOW, ANY-WAY.
I AM SHINGEN-SAMA'S MESSENGER. I DON'T MEAN TO FIGHT YOU.
TO SEAL THIS ALLIANCE, IT'S BEEN ARRANGED THAT DOI MASAKAGE-DONO WILL VISIT IEYASU-SAMA, CARRYING SHINGEN-SAMA'S LETTER WITH HIM.
"I HAVE NO INTENTION OF FIGHTING YOU, TOKUGAWA-DONO. IN FACT, I WOULD RATHER JOIN HANDS AND GO AFTER UJI-ZANE TOGETHER," HE SAYS.
"KEEPING THE ŌI RIVER AS THE BORDER, TAKEDA SHALL TAKE SURUGA. SO, TOKUGAWA-DONO, PLEASE SEIZE TŌTŌMI.

YES, I HEARD.
THERE. I'VE TOLD YOU, HANZŌ!
DID SHINGEN-SAMA SAY ANYTHING ABOUT ME?
PERHAPS YOU ARE.
WE ARE SUPPA!
KNOW YOUR OWN PLACE, HANZŌ.

I AM HATTORI HANZŌ MASANARI, IEYASU'S VASSAL!
ARE YOU TELLING ME YOU *AREN'T* ?!
BECAUSE I AM HIS VASSAL, I DO NOT SPEAK OF MY MASTER WITH AN HONORIFIC WHEN I TALK PUBLICLY TO ANYONE OUTSIDE MY CLAN.
I DO NOT ADD AN HONORIFIC, SUCH AS SHINGEN-*SAMA* OR DOI MASAKAGE-*DONO*, THE WAY YOU DO.

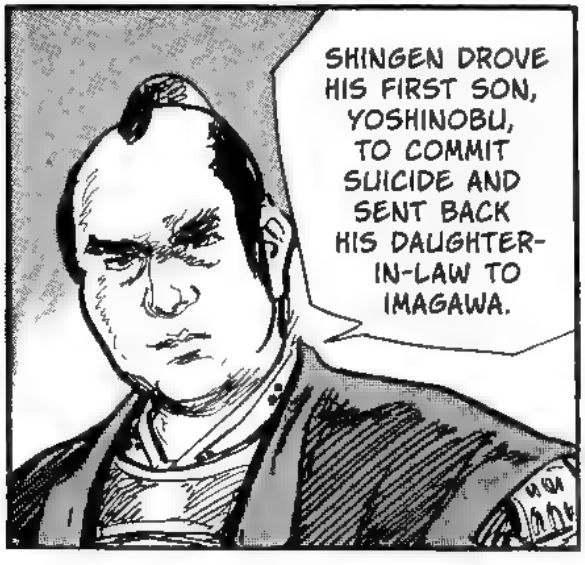

*ONRIEDO GONGUJŌDO.
!!

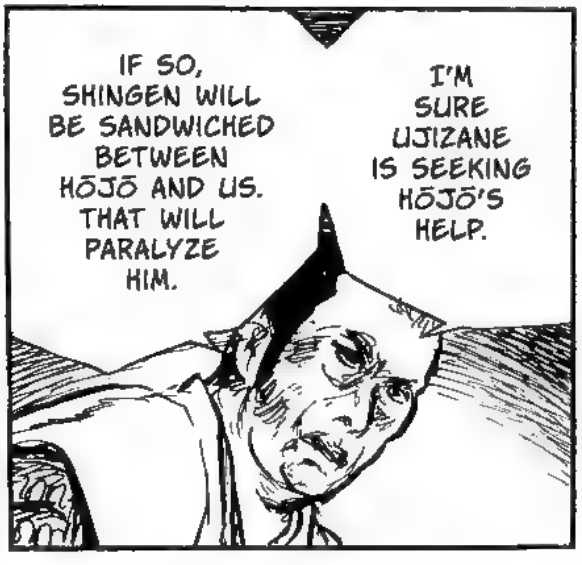

TAKEDA WILL INVADE SUNPU WITH TEN THOUSAND MEN.
HMPH. SO HE SAYS WE SHOULD TAKE TŌTŌMI.
AND SHINGEN-*DONO* WILL OBTAIN SUNPU WITH EVEN LESS.
AH HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA.
IF YOU STRIKE HIM THERE, IEYASU-*SAMA*, TŌTŌMI WILL BE YOURS WITHOUT MUCH TROUBLE.
UNABLE TO FEND US OFF, UJIZANE WILL PROBABLY FLEE TO KAKEGAWA CASTLE.

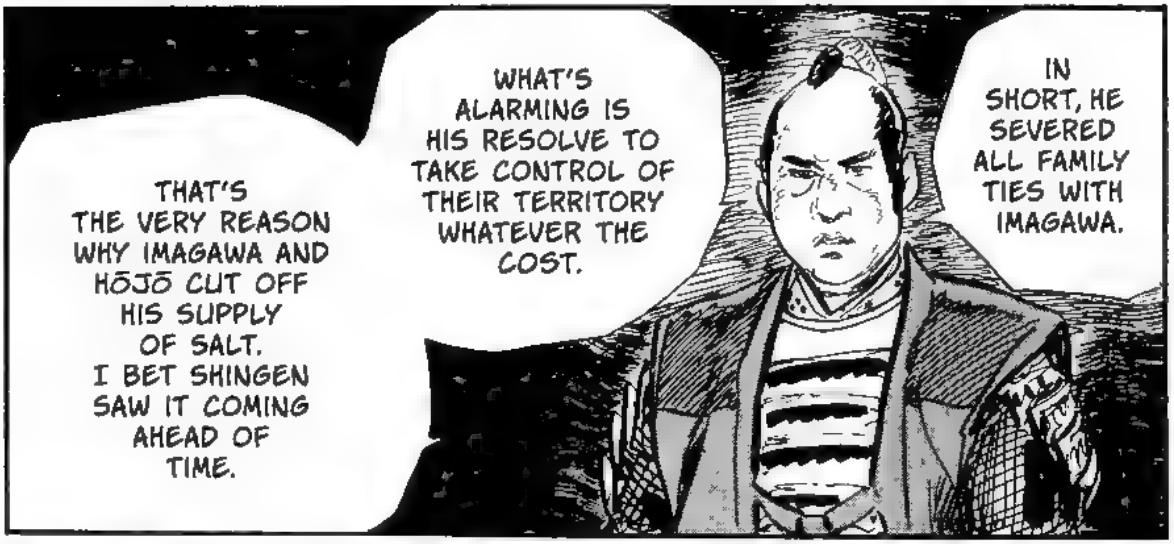
AH HA HA HA HA
HA HA HA
THE MOMENT UJIZANE HEARS YOU BROUGHT MORE THAN TEN THOUSAND MEN, HE WILL UNDOUBTEDLY RUN AWAY WITHOUT A FIGHT.
BY HAVING ME ATTACK, TAKEDA WILL WIN HALF OF IAGAWA WITHOUT LOSING A SINGLE MAN.
NOT ONLY THAT, YOU'LL GAIN THE MOST PIVOTAL GROUND IN TŌKAI, CALLED SUNPU.
I AGREE TO IT.
YOU *REFUSE* THEN?

PLEASE TELL SHINGEN-*DONO* THAT THIS MUTUAL NON-AGGRESSION PACT MUST BE ADHERED TO BEFORE EVERYTHING ELSE.
JUST MAKE CERTAIN THAT THIS LETTER WILL NOT TURN BLANK.
I SHALL.

...AND THEN, USING THAT MOMENTUM, SWEEPING OVER TO SUNPU AND FACING TAKEDA HEAD ON?
HOW ABOUT SEIZING TŌTŌMI...
I CAN'T IMAGINE TAKEDA STICKING TO THE TREATY.


SHINGEN DROVE HIS FIRST SON, YOSHINOBU, TO COMMIT SUICIDE AND SENT BACK HIS DAUGHTER-IN-LAW TO IMAGAWA.


IF SO, SHINGEN WILL BE SANDWICHED BETWEEN HŌJŌ AND US. THAT WILL PARALYZE HIM.
I'M SURE UJIZANE IS SEEKING HŌJŌ'S HELP.


IN SHORT, HE SEVERED ALL FAMILY TIES WITH IMAGAWA.
WHAT'S ALARMING IS HIS RESOLVE TO TAKE CONTROL OF THEIR TERRITORY WHATEVER THE COST.
THAT'S THE VERY REASON WHY IMAGAWA AND HŌJŌ CUT OFF HIS SUPPLY OF SALT. I BET SHINGEN SAW IT COMING AHEAD OF TIME.

TO RESCUE UJIZANE, HŌJŌ WILL RUSH INTO IMAGAWA TERRITORY FROM BOTH ROUTES, THE LAND AND THE SEA. SHINGEN MUST SEIZE SUNPU BEFORE THEY DO.
THE WHOLE THING COULD'VE BEEN HIS SET-UP TO GAUGE HOW HŌJŌ MIGHT REACT.
IF UJIZANE FIGHTS BACK WITH FULL FORCE, TAKEDA WILL BE IN TROUBLE.
SHINGEN IS UNEASY ABOUT HŌJŌ LAUNCHING AN ATTACK FROM THE SEA.

MEANWHILE, HŌJŌ IS COUNTING ON UJIZANE TO BE ABLE TO HOLD OUT FOR AT LEAST TEN DAYS. A REAL MISCALCULATION THERE.
THAT'S WHY THEY'LL THREATEN UJIZANE BY SHOUTING THAT THEY HAVE TEN THOUSAND TROOPS, HOPING TO SCOOP UP SUNPU BEFORE HŌJŌ ARRIVES.

INDEED, SHINGEN AND I. OUR INTERESTS OVERLAP COMPLETELY THIS TIME.
AH HA HA HA HA HA.
IT WOULD BE THE SAME WITH US. IF WE FIGHT TAKEDA, HŌJŌ WILL LAUNCH A SURPRISE ATTACK.
HŌJŌ UJIMASA, STRIKING US FROM THE SEA. THAT WOULD BE SCARY.
OTHERWISE, I WOULD'VE HAD TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT.
AH HA HA HA HA HA. THANK GOD SHINGEN APPROACHED ME FIRST.
WHAT A GOOD DEAL. TAKING OVER TŌTŌMI FIRST. THAT WAS THE BIGGEST GOAL I HAD IN MIND.

NOT ONLY THAT, WE DON'T HAVE TO FIGHT TAKEDA'S FAMOUS CAVALRY. THEY ARE FORBIDDING, YOU KNOW.
HA HA HA HA HA. IT'S A GREAT DEAL! HA HA HA HA HA.
THIS MASTER MAY NEVER BE KILLED, NOT ON THE BATTLEFIELD, THOUGHT KANZŌ.

EARLY TOMORROW MORNING, WE'LL ENTER TŌTŌMI AND HIT KAKEGAWA CASTLE IN A SINGLE STROKE.
BUT I CAN'T SHAKE OFF SOME UNEASINESS.
BACHI BACHI
I WOULDN'T THINK SO. BUT THEY COULD STILL JAM A STICK IN OUR WHEELS.
EVEN TAKEDA CAN'T HAVE EXTRA SOLDIERS TO SPARE AND SEND AGAINST US.
I REMAIN APPREHENSIVE ABOUT WHETHER OR NOT TAKEDA WILL HONOR OUR PACT.

BESIDES, THEY DON'T HAVE TO DIVIDE UP THEIR REGULAR TROOPS. THEIR *SUPPA* COULD EASILY DO THE JOB. LISTEN, TAKEDA IS KNOWN TO HAVE OVER FIVE HUNDRED *SUPPA* WORKING FOR THEM.
IN LIGHT OF THE PACT, THEY WON'T CONFRONT US OPENLY. BUT THEY CAN CAUSE TROUBLE WHEREVER WE GO AND SLOW DOWN OUR ATTACK ON KAKEGAWA.
COMBINED, THEY AMOUNT TO FIVE HUNDRED.
YES SIR. A *SUPPA* CLAN CALLED TOBI USED TO BE SPLIT BETWEEN TAKEDA AND SUWA. HOWEVER, FROM WHAT I HEAR, AFTER THE SUWA CLAN FELL THEY ALL CAME UNDER TAKEDA'S CONTROL.
ISN'T THAT RIGHT, HANZŌ?
THERE'S A STRONG CHANCE THE TAKEDA *SUPPA* WILL STIR UP THE *JIZAMURAI* TO HOLD THE CASTLE AND FIGHT BACK.
SLAP
HORITA CASTLE IN KEGA IS OUR FIRST SUSPECT.

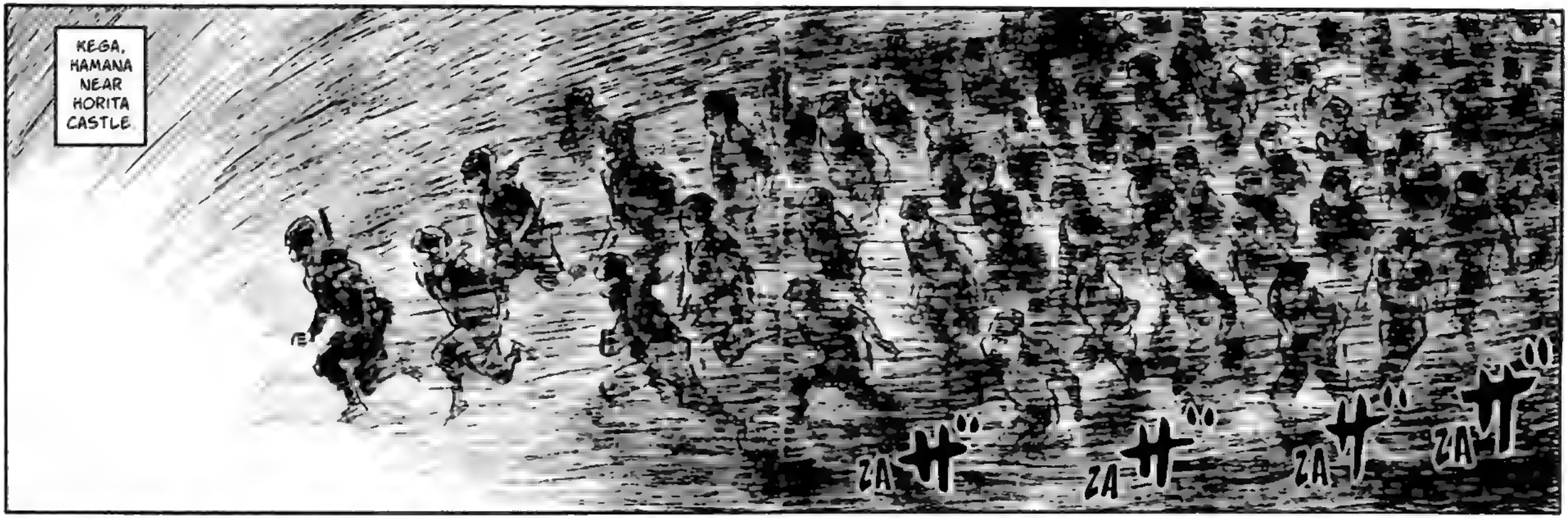
ISN'T IT TO TAKEDA'S ADVANTAGE... TO HAVE KAKEGAWA CASTLE SURRENDER AS SOON AS POSSIBLE?
WHY WOULD TAKEDA INTERFERE WITH US?
IF WE TAKE KAKEGAWA CASTLE BEFORE THEN, UJIZANE MIGHT STAY PUT IN SUNPU AND RESIST IN FULL FORCE.
TAKEDA WANTS TO HIT SUNPU FIRST. WE MUST STORM KAKEGAWA CASTLE AFTER UJIZANE BOLTS INSIDE IT IN A FRANTIC RUSH. THAT'S WHAT SHINGEN WANTS.
SHINGEN WANTS TO HAVE UJIZANE GO TO KAKEGAWA CASTLE AND HAVE US FIGHT HIM THERE. IF IT GOES WELL, TAKEDA MAY EVEN STRIKE US AND SEIZE MIKAWA, TOO. I HAVE A FEELING THAT'S WHAT SHINGEN HAS IN MIND.

THAT'S WHY WE MUST FIND A STRATEGY TO OUT-MANEUVER HIM.
HE OFFERED HIS TREATY ONLY TO ACHIEVE THAT END. IN SHORT, IT'S DESIGNED TO STALL US.
SHINGEN-*SAMA* ONCE TOLD ME THAT HE IS INDEBTED TO ME AND WILL PAY ME BACK WHEN THE OCCASION ARISES.
I CAN'T IMAGINE THAT HE WOULD BREAK OUR PACT AFTER WE'VE ALL SWORN TO IT.
I BEG YOUR PARDON, SIR, BUT...
WE MUST BE CLEVER ABOUT THIS.

IT'S NOT *YOU* THAT HE WOULD BETRAY. IT'S ME.
DUE TO THE BOND YOU HAVE WITH TSUKUMO, HE PROBABLY THINKS FAVORABLY OF YOU.
SINCE YOU TERMINATED KITE KATŌ, HE MUST RECOGNIZE YOUR TALENT, AND AT THE SAME TIME, FEEL GRATITUDE AS WELL.
I'LL BET HE WANTS TO HAVE AN EXCELLENT MAN LIKE YOU BY HIS SIDE.
BUT THAT'S A SEPARATE MATTER FROM THIS WAR.

IF ANY TAKEDA SUPPA BLOCK OUR WAY, IT ONLY FITS WITH YOUR ASSESSMENT. IN THAT CASE, WE'LL FIGHT AS IF WE'RE EXPECTING THE ARRIVAL OF OUR RESERVE FORCE.
I WOULD LIKE TO TAKE SOME MEN FROM IGA TO HORITA CASTLE AHEAD OF YOU.
SUPPA SHOULD FIGHT AMONG OURSELVES.
WHETHER WE ADVANCE OR RETREAT, HIKUMA IS A GOOD PLACE FOR THAT.
MEANWHILE, MILORD, PLEASE CROSS LAKE HAMANA AND TAKE OVER OSAKABE, SHIROSUGA, UTSUYAMA, AND THEN HIKUMA.
IT'S DECIDED THEN! GO, HANZŌ!
A NICE SPOT TO COUNTER AN ATTACK FROM THE SEA, TOO.

YES SIR.
JUST DO NOT WASTE YOUR LIFE. REMEMBER, WAR IS ABOUT ES-CAPING.
HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA.
IF MY GUESS IS WRONG, MAYBE I'LL SHAVE MY HEAD AND JOIN THE PRIEST-HOOD.
WELL, I'M AS CRAFTY AS SHINGEN, IF NOT MORE, EH?


KEGA. HAMANA NEAR HORITA CASTLE
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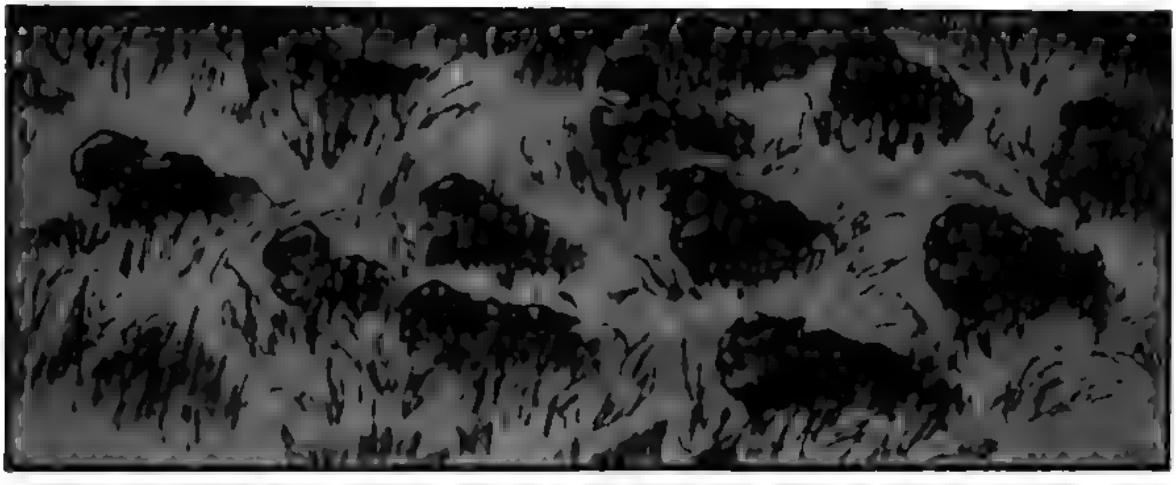


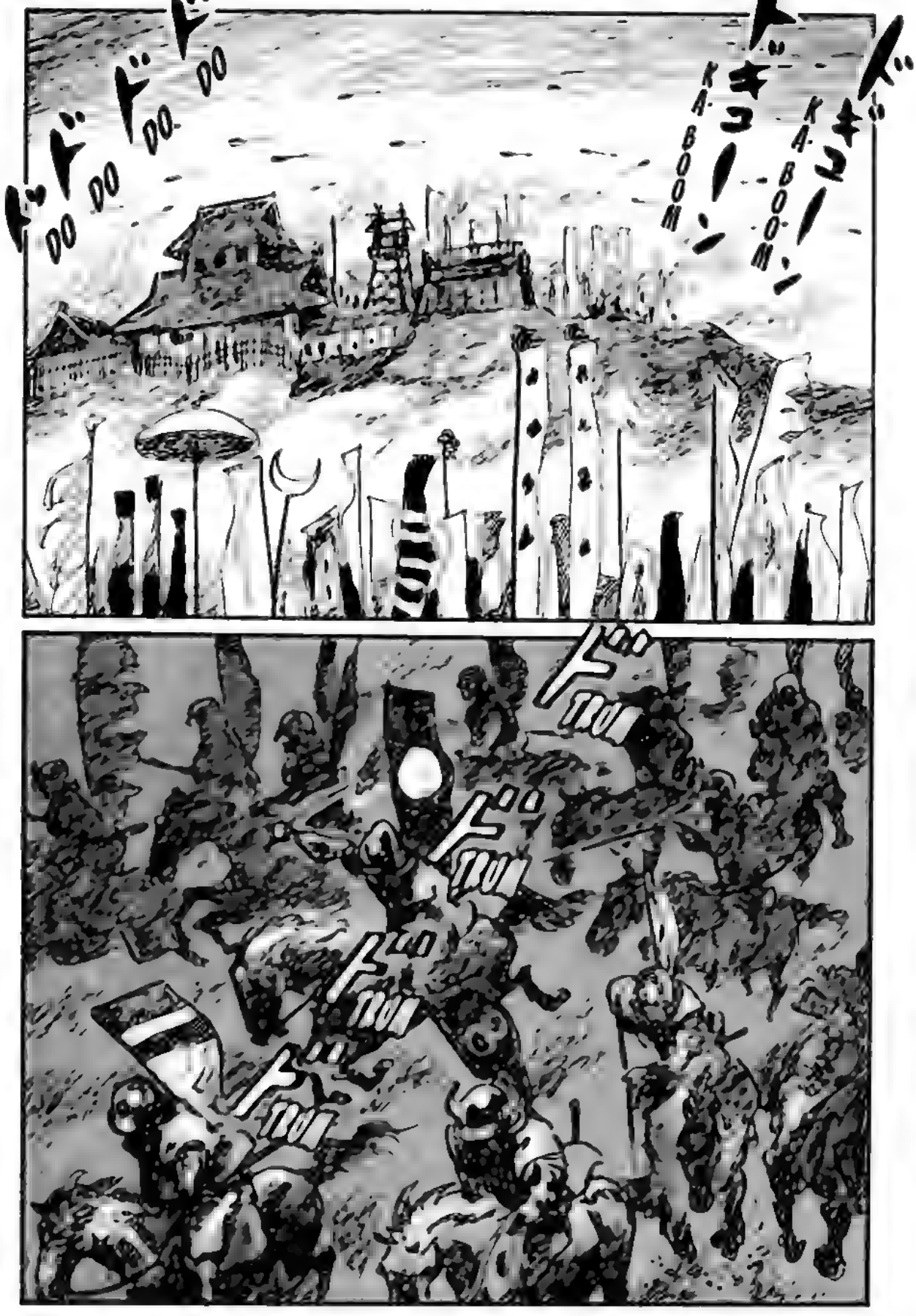
TOO LATE, HANZŌ! HORITA CASTLE IS ALREADY UNDER OUR CONTROL. HEH HEH HEH.
WHAT'S YOUR NEXT MOVE, HANZŌ, THE BEST OF IGA?!
IF YOU WANT, I'LL CONSIDER FIGHTING YOU ONE-ON-ONE.

PULL BACK!
ZA
ZA
ZA
SO YOU SHRINK AWAY, SCARED?! HANZŌ!!

BECAUSE YOUR DUTY IS TO DEFEND THE CASTLE AND STAND IN OUR WAY.
YOU CAN'T COME AFTER US, CAN YOU?
RETREATING WITHOUT A FIGHT? THAT PROVES YOU'RE NO MORE THAN A *SUPPA* MERELY SENT AS HIS SCOUT!
YOU MAKE ME LAUGH!
...THAT YOU'RE NO *SUPPA* BUT IEYASU'S VASSAL.
HOW ABOUT YOU?! YOU DECLARED, DEFIANTLY...
IF YOU LOSE, YOU WILL FAIL IN YOUR DUTY TO HOLD THIS CASTLE TO THE LAST!
DID SHINGEN-*SAMA* ORDER YOU TO FIGHT ME?

INDEED, YOU'RE *ONLY* A *SUPPA*. YOU CAN'T HELP LETTING YOUR OWN JUDGMENT COME BEFORE YOUR MASTER'S COMMANDS.
NO... THAT'S *IMPOS-SIBLE!*
HE'S ACTING... ACCORDING TO HIS MASTER'S ORDERS ...?

うぉー
HAYAAAH
FEIGNING A STRIKE AGAINST HORITA CASTLE, IEYASU LANDED ON THE OPPOSITE BANK OF LAKE HAMANA AND LAUNCHED FIERCE ASSAULTS UPON THE UNGUARDED CASTLES AT OSAKABE, SHIROSUGA AND UTSUYAMA.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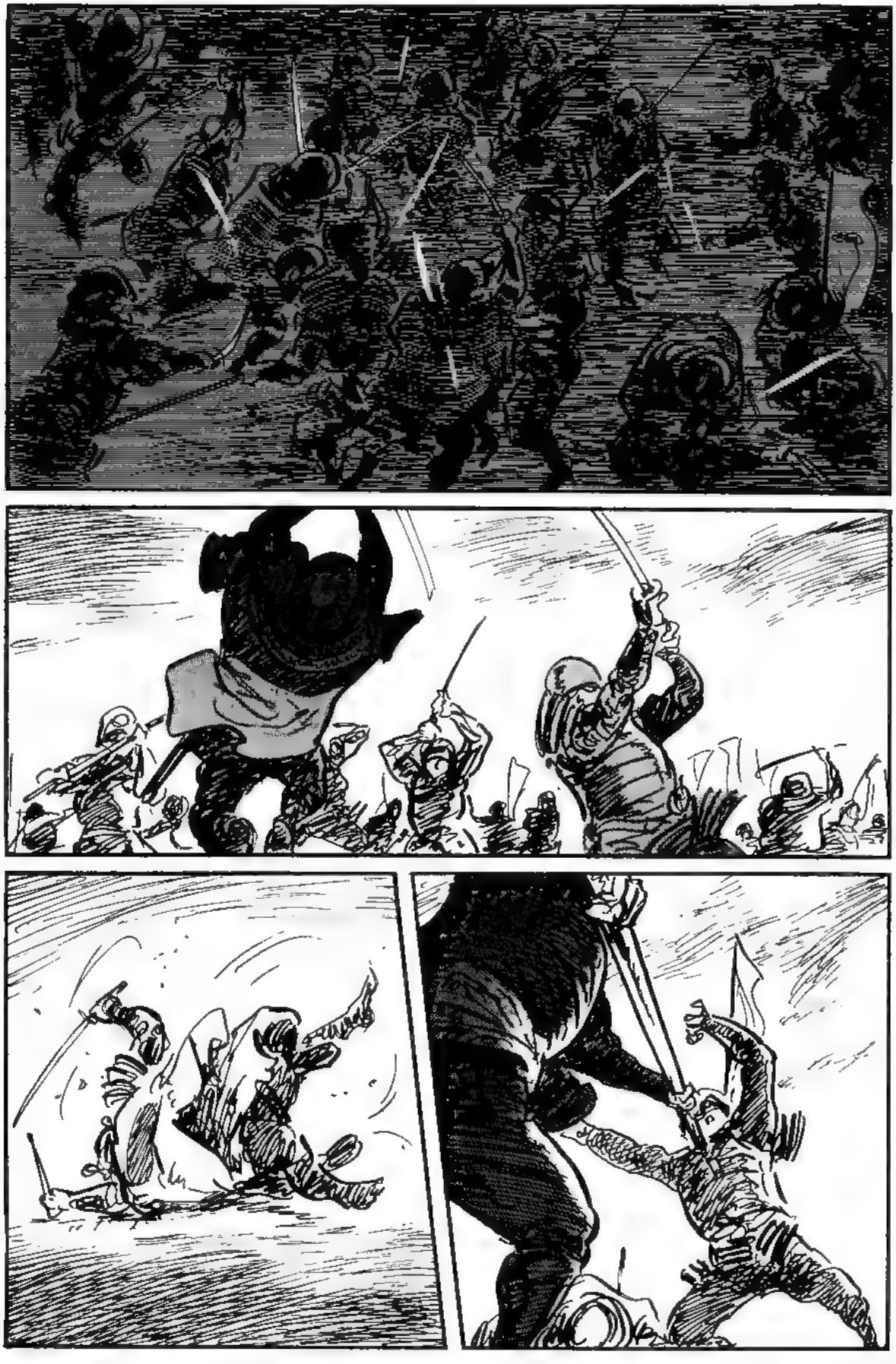

ABOUT THE SAME TIME SHINGEN ADVANCED TO ITA IN SHINANO AND AT SAITA PASS HE ROUTED THE MASAKA ARMY LED BY TOBURA AKA-NO-KABE

YAAHHH

IN TANDEM WITH THESE MOVEMENTS, HŌJŌ UJIMASA LEFT ODAWARA AND THEN APPROACHED MISHIMA WITH HIS ARMY.

WHAT ABOUT UJIZANE? HOW LONG CAN HE HOLD SUNPU?
TAKEDA DESTROYED THE IMAGAWA FORCES AT SATTA PASS! USING THAT MOMENTUM, THEY'RE ADVANCING ON THE *FUCHŪ*! THERE ARE NO IMAGAWA SOLDIERS THAT CAN STOP THEIR DEVASTATING CAVALRY.
...AAT !?!
WHA...
ACCORDING TO THE REPORT OF OUR *SUPPA* SCOUTS, WITH NO FIGHT WHATSOEVER HE FLED TO THE SAFETY OF KAKEGAWA CASTLE.
ER... WELL...
UJIZANE RAN AWAY, EH? IF HE'S GONE TO KAKEGAWA CASTLE, IT'S IEYASU WHO'LL STRIKE HIM NEXT!
HA HA HA HA HA HA.
FWA HA HA HA HA HA.

WE'LL BREAK UP INTO TWO FORCES. YOU STRIKE TAKEDA FROM SATTA PASS! I WILL APPROACH SUNPU BY SEA!
WHAT SHOULD WE DO NOW, FATHER?
IF HE WAS GOING TO FIGHT ANYWAY, HE SHOULD'VE HELD OUT AT SUNPU, EVEN IF JUST FOR A DAY OR TWO. IF HE DID, WE COULD HAVE ACTED IN CONCERT AND DRIVEN SHINGEN TO HIS FALL!
IF WE PULL BACK NOW IT WOULD BE A DISGRACE TO OUR VERY NAMES, HŌJŌ UJIYASU AND UJIMASA.
WE MIGHT AS WELL TAKE OVER IMAGAWA. WHATEVER HAPPENS TO A HALFWIT LIKE UJIZANE, IT DOESN'T BOTHER ME.

MMMG!
ZAAA
IEYASU WON THE SURRENDERS OF OSAKABE, SHIROSUGA, AND UTSUYAMA, AND THEN ENTERED HIKUMA!?
YES SIR!
NO... WOULD THEY?
UNLESS WE TRIP THEM UP, THEY MIGHT EVEN SWARM INTO SURUGA.
SO FAST! FAST, INDEED.

IT'S NOT GOOD.
YOU FOOL!
THINK! UJIMASA IS COMING UP FROM BEHIND WHILE UJIYASU DRAWS NEAR ON THE SEA!
YES SIR!
TELL AKIYAMA NOBUTOMO IN TAKATŌ TO GO TO TŌTŌMI AND HIT IEYASU AT MITSUKE.
MEANWHILE, ADVANCE NOBUTOMO TO OKITSU. HAVE HIM BUILD A FORTRESS AND STOP UJIMASA AS HE COMES FROM SATTA.
WE'LL MOVE OUR HEADQUARTERS TO KUNŌ CASTLE! THAT WAY WE CAN CONFRONT UJIYASU AS HE APPROACHES FROM THE SEA.
ZAAAA

MUCH FASTER THAN I THOUGHT!
HŌJŌ AND IEYASU. THEY'RE FAST!
WUOA
TAKEDA IS COMING AFTER US!
H... HURRY! HURRY UP!

IF WE KILL HIM NOW, KAKEGAWA WILL BE IN OUR HANDS WITHOUT BREAKING A SWEAT.
THAT'S UJIZANE!
HANZŌ THOUGHT HE WAS WATCHING HISTORY UNFOLD BEFORE HIS EYES.
WE WERE GIVEN NO SUCH ORDER!
DO NOT MOVE!
BESIDES, HE ISN'T WORTH KILLING.

ZA

MESSENGER!
OKUDAIRA SADAKATSU AND HIS ARMY SHOULD BE NEARING MITSUKE BY NOW.
SO, UJIZANE MADE IT TO KAKEGAWA CASTLE.

SADAKATSU MUST ATTACK KAKEGAWA CASTLE BY DAWN! THE MAIN FORCE WILL JOIN HIM BY NOON.
YES SIR!
KRMPT
KRMPT
YES SIR!
ZA
ZA
ZA

TAKEDA *SUPPA* MAY TRY TO SLIP IN.
THE REST OF YOU, JOIN THE MAIN FORCE AND KEEP CLOSE WATCH.
TEN OF YOU, COME WITH ME TO THE ADVANCE UNIT UNDER OKUDAIRA!
YES SIR!
UNDER-STOOD?!
ZA
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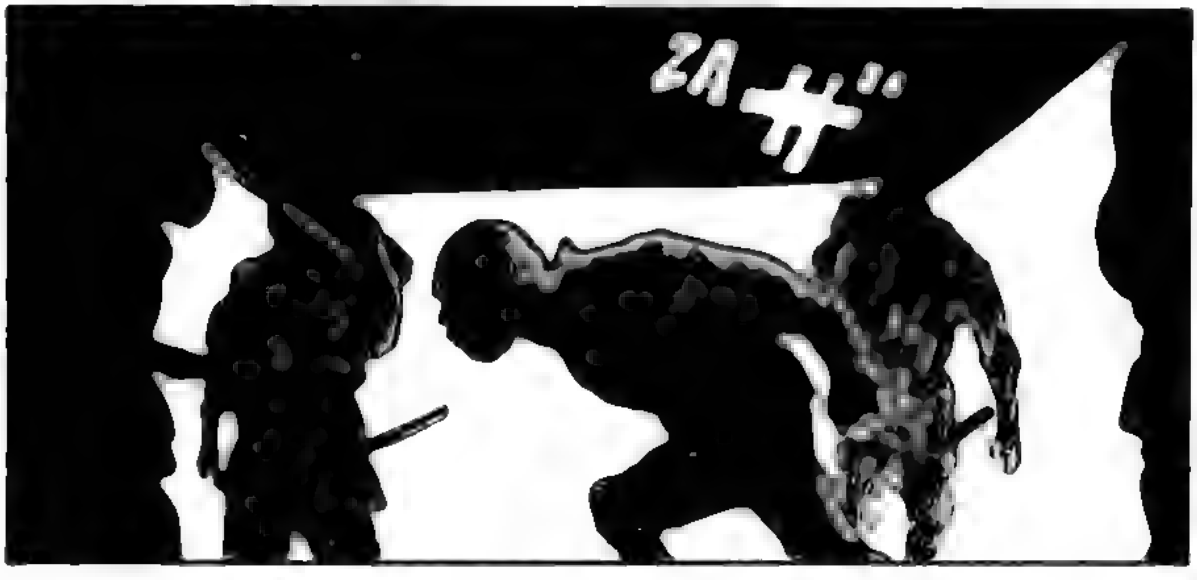
ZA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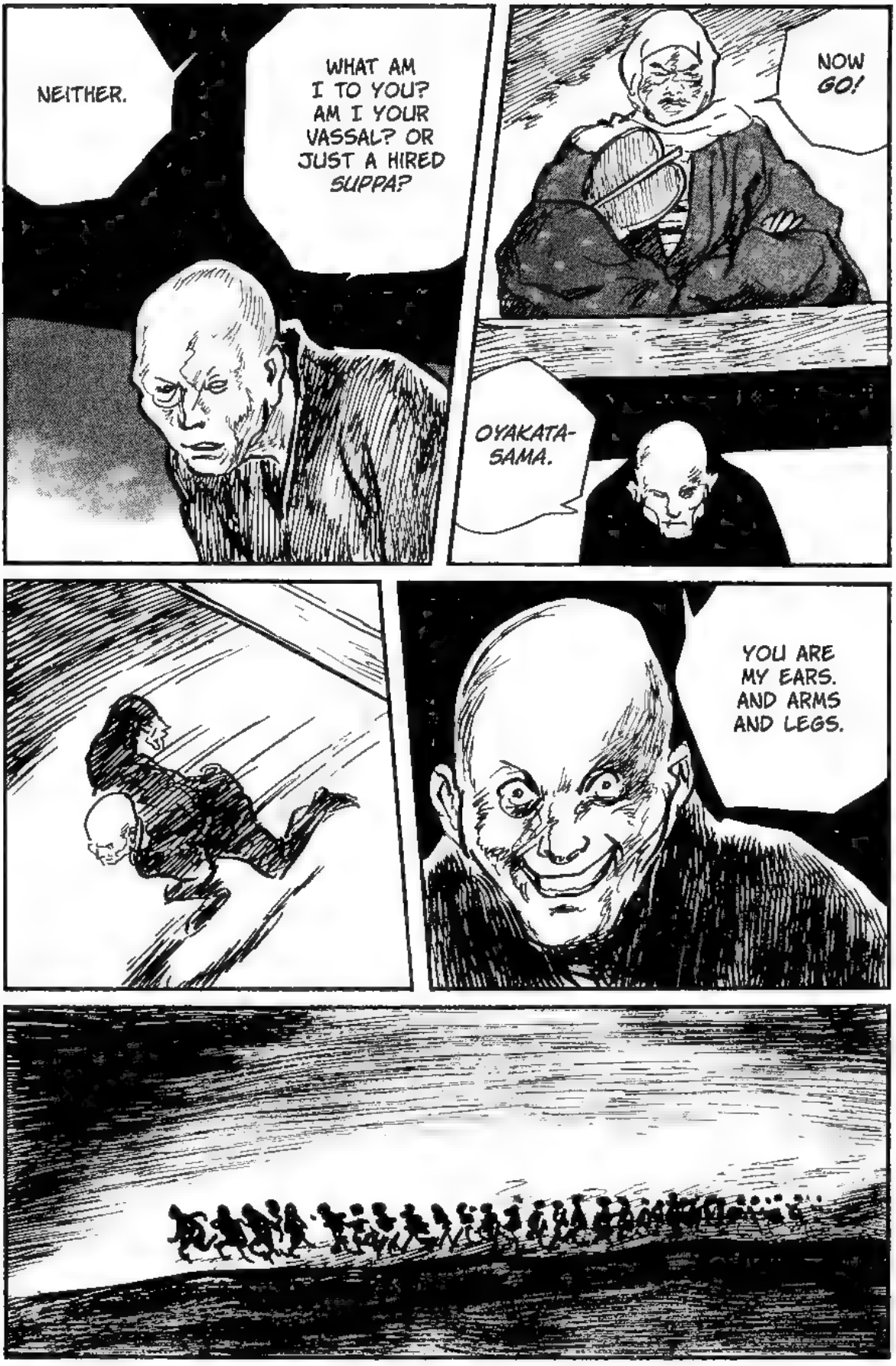
WHAT ABOUT TOKUGAWA'S ADVANCE TROOPS?!
TWO THOUSAND MEN LED BY OKUDAIRA SADAKATSU SHOULD BE ENTERING MITSUKE NOW.
AKIYAMA NOBUTOMO-SAMA'S GROUP IS CLOSING ON MITSUKE.
YES SIR.
TELL NOBUTOMO TO LAUNCH HIS ATTACK!
YES!
FIRST, TO SLOW IEYASU'S MARCH. HE IS LIKELY TO BE UPSET THAT OYAKATA-SAMA WOULD BREAK YOUR TREATY, AND HE WILL SEND A MESSENGER TO PROTEST.
BUT IT MUST BE ONLY A FEINT. THERE ARE TWO REASONS FOR THIS. CAN YOU TELL ME WHAT THEY ARE, MOZU?

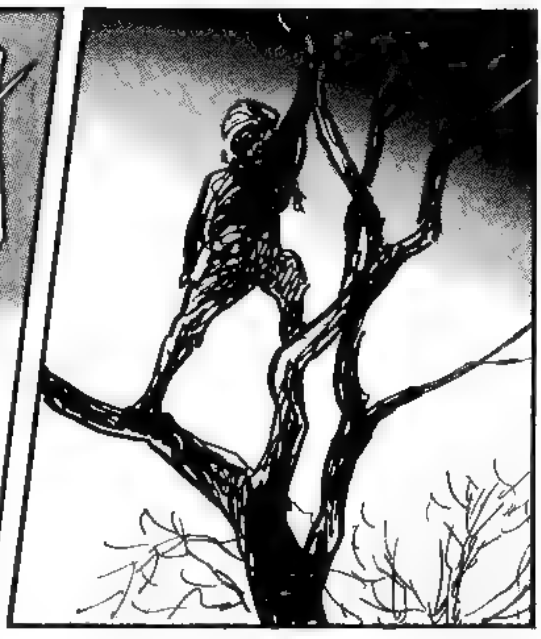
ONCE NOBUTOMO-SAMA ATTACKS, IN HIS SURPRISE OKUDAIRA WILL RUSH A MESSENGER TO IEYASU.
SECONDLY, TO HAVE ME TERMINATE IEYASU!
UH-HUH.
IN THE PROCESS, WE WILL BE ABLE TO STALL HIM.
...AND THEN PRETEND TO BE HIM. AND I'LL KILL IEYASU!
I WILL LIE IN WAIT FOR THAT MESSENGER...
.....
.....
DO NOT TOUCH HIM. IF YOU CANNOT APPROACH IEYASU WITHOUT KILLING HANZŌ, JUST PULL BACK!
REMEMBER, HE HAS HANZŌ.
THAT IGA SUPPA IS NO MATCH FOR ME.


NEITHER.
WHAT AM I TO YOU? AM I YOUR VASSAL? OR JUST A HIRED SUPPA?
NOW GO!
OYAKATA-SAMA.
YOU ARE MY EARS. AND ARMS AND LEGS.

TRUM
TRUM
TRUM
TRUM
YAHHHH

SCOUT!

ARE THEY TAKEDA SOL-DIERS?
AN ARMY IS ATTACKING OKUDAIRA'S FORCES!



DOO TRUM
DOO TRUM
DOO TRUM
DOO TRUM
DOO TRUM
MMG...
I BELIEVE THEY'RE AKIYAMA NOBUTOMO'S TROOPS.
HM!
AND WHAT ELSE ...?
TO STALL OUR LORD ...?
WHY IS TAKEDA ATTACKING?
OKUDAIRA IS SENDING A MESSENGER!
IT'S QUITE POSSIBLE.

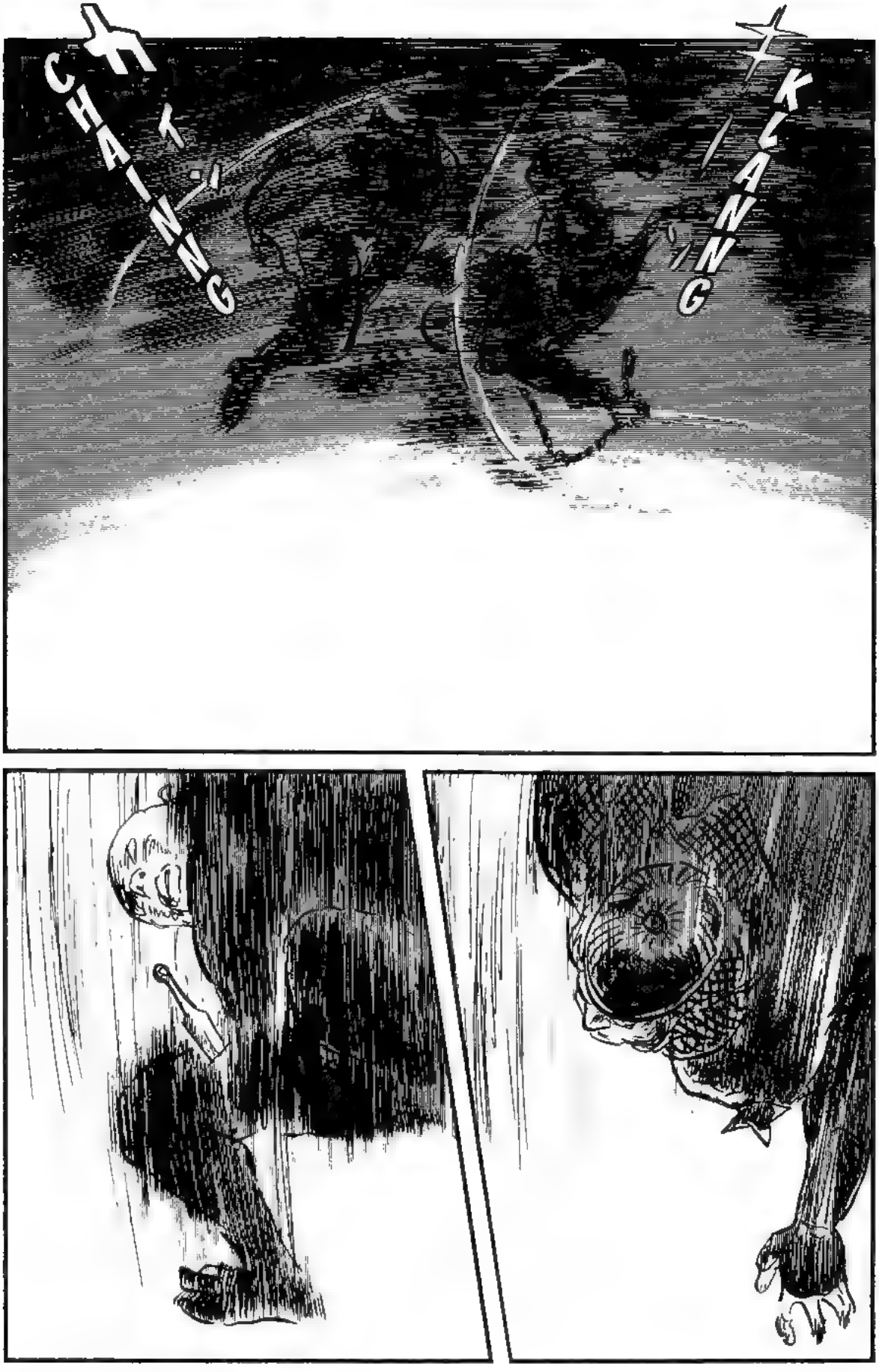
KRMPT
KRMPT
KRMPT
THOK
CHOK
THOK
CHOK
THOK
CHOK

BU
HHHHH
EEEEE
INO!
KRRRTTT
RRTTT
TOU

SLAUGHTER THEM ALL!
AS I THOUGHT.

SHRNNG
ーーヤーーー!!

TERMI-
NATE
MOZU
AND
HIS
MEN!
AND
THE
REST...
TWO
OF YOU,
FLY
AWAY!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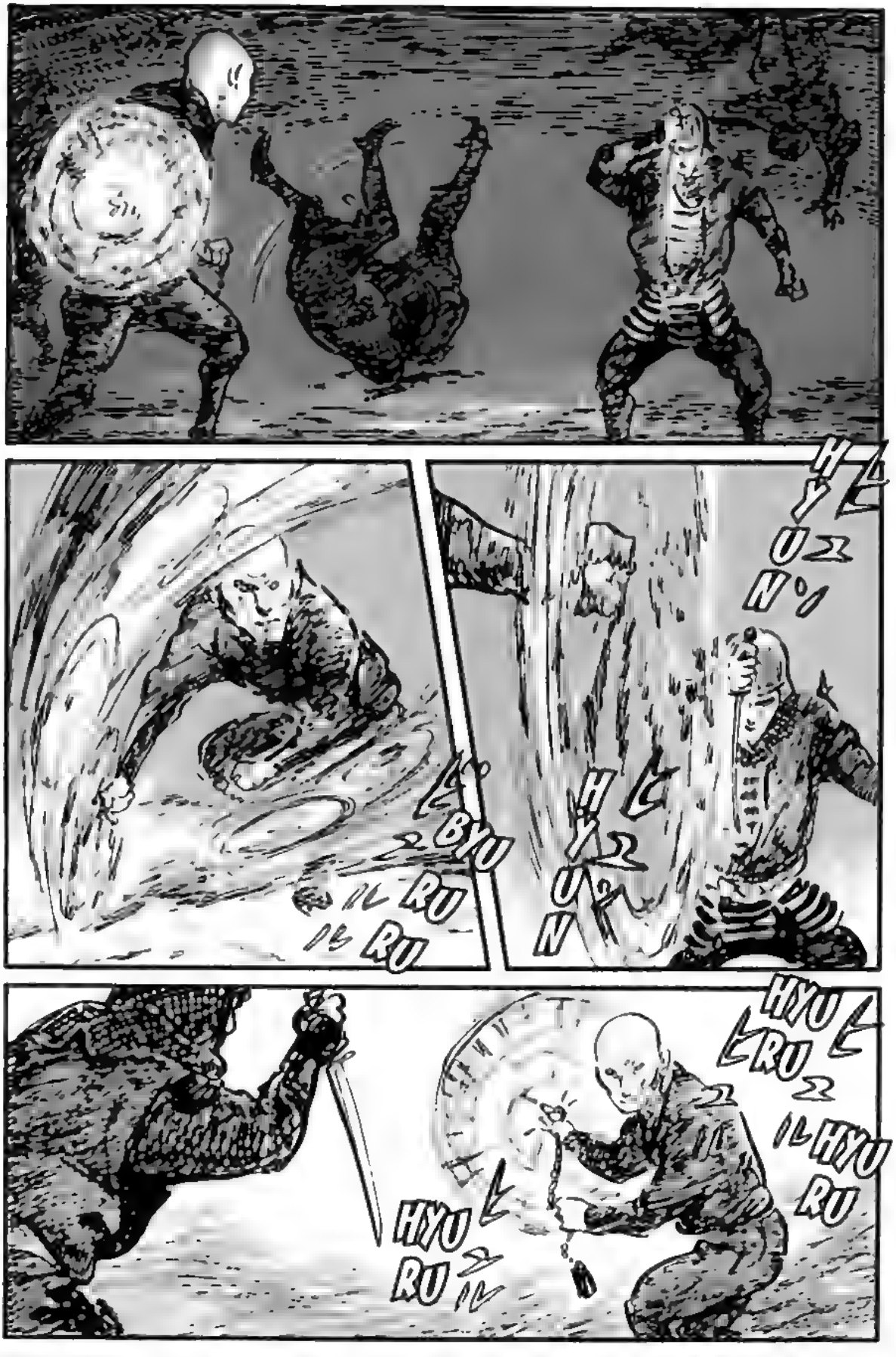
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I'M FINE.

MOZU ISN'T MY NAME. IT'S *UMEBOSHI.*
EVEN MY *OYAKATA-SAMA* DOES...
BUT EVERYONE... THEY ALL CALL ME MOZU.
SAMURAI ARE PLUM FLOWERS, BUT *SHINOBI* ARE...*SUPPA* ARE *UMEBOSHI*. IT'S SOUR, THAT'S WHY IT'S LIKE *SUPPA*.
SHINOBI ARE *UMEBOSHI*. A PICKLED PLUM IS DRY. IT LASTS LONG. AND IT TASTES SOUR. BUT IT'S GOOD FOR YOU.

I WANTED TO BE THE STAR AMONG ALL *SUPPA* WHO SHINE IN THE DARK.
IT'S NEVER... SWEET...
BECAUSE I WANTED TO BE THE STAR OF *UMEBOSHI*, I CALLED MYSELF *UMEBOSHI*, THE STAR OF PLUMS.
HANZŌ, THE BEST OF IGA!!

.....
.....
WHY...WHY DIDN'T YOU USE THE PISTOL... FROM THE BEGINNING...?
I BEAT YOU...AS A SUPPA, I AM SUPERIOR.
ISN'T THAT IT?
YOU ARE A SUPPA, TOO. YOU DIDN'T WANT TO SETTLE THE FIGHT WITH A GUN.

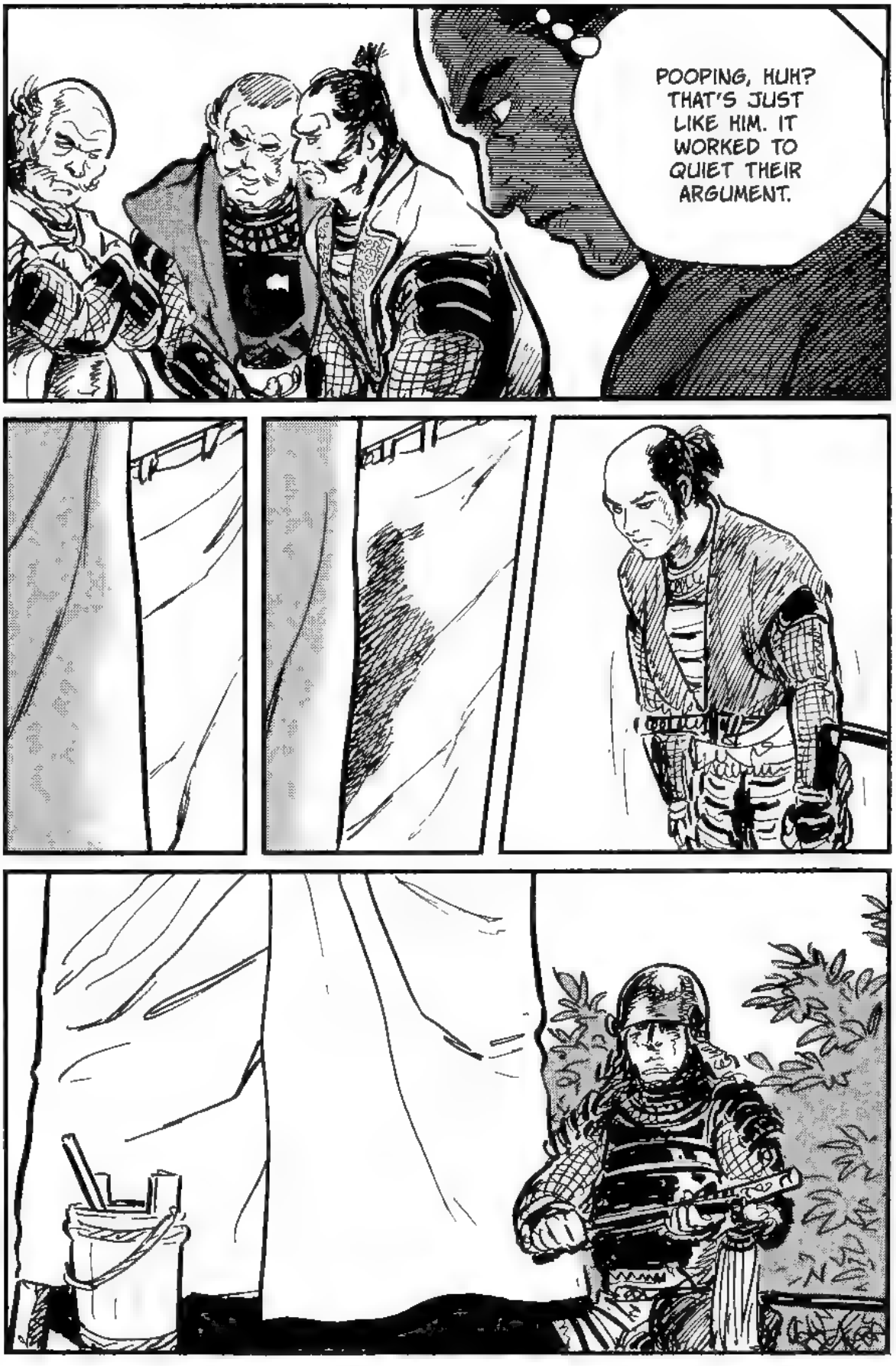
OYAKATA-SAMA TOLD ME...THAT I MUST NOT TOUCH YOU...
IF I'D USED THE PISTOL FROM THE START, MOZU...I MEAN, UMEBOSHI, WOULD'VE FOUGHT ME DIFFERENTLY. HE WOULD'VE FOUGHT TO KILL...
THE ERA IN WHICH THE SUPPA TECHNIQUES RULED IS ABOUT TO END. IT'S ABOUT WEAPONS NOW...TIMES ARE CHANGING. IT'S WEAPONS THAT DETERMINE THE VICTOR.
I AM NOT A SUPPA.

KRING

厭離穢土欣求淨土

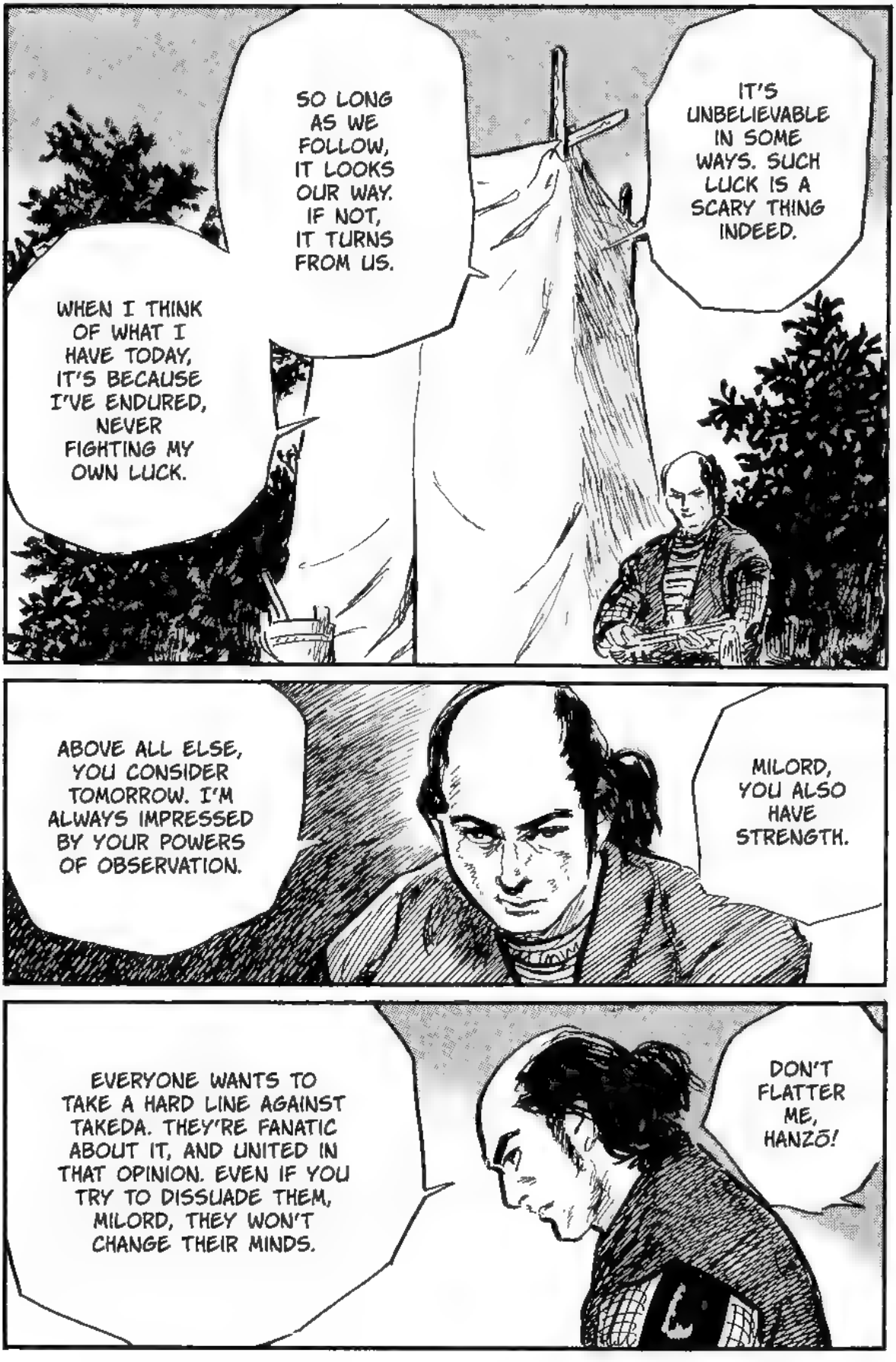
HE HAD AKIYAMA NOBUTOMO ATTACK OKUDAIRA! IT'S AN *OUTRAGE!*
AFTER... AFTER URGING US TO STORM KAKEGAWA, THEY DARED TO INTERFERE! *WHAT THE HELL?!*
THAT *BASTARD,* SHINGEN! I HAVE NO CLUE WHAT HE'S THINKING!
WHAT'S THE POINT OF HAVING THE TREATY OR THE ALLIANCE!
IT APPEARS THEY CAME SOUTH FROM INA ALONG TENRYŪ RIVER.
WHEN DID AKIYAMA OF TAKATŌ GO TO MITSUKE, ANYWAY? IT WAS A SWIFT MOVE.

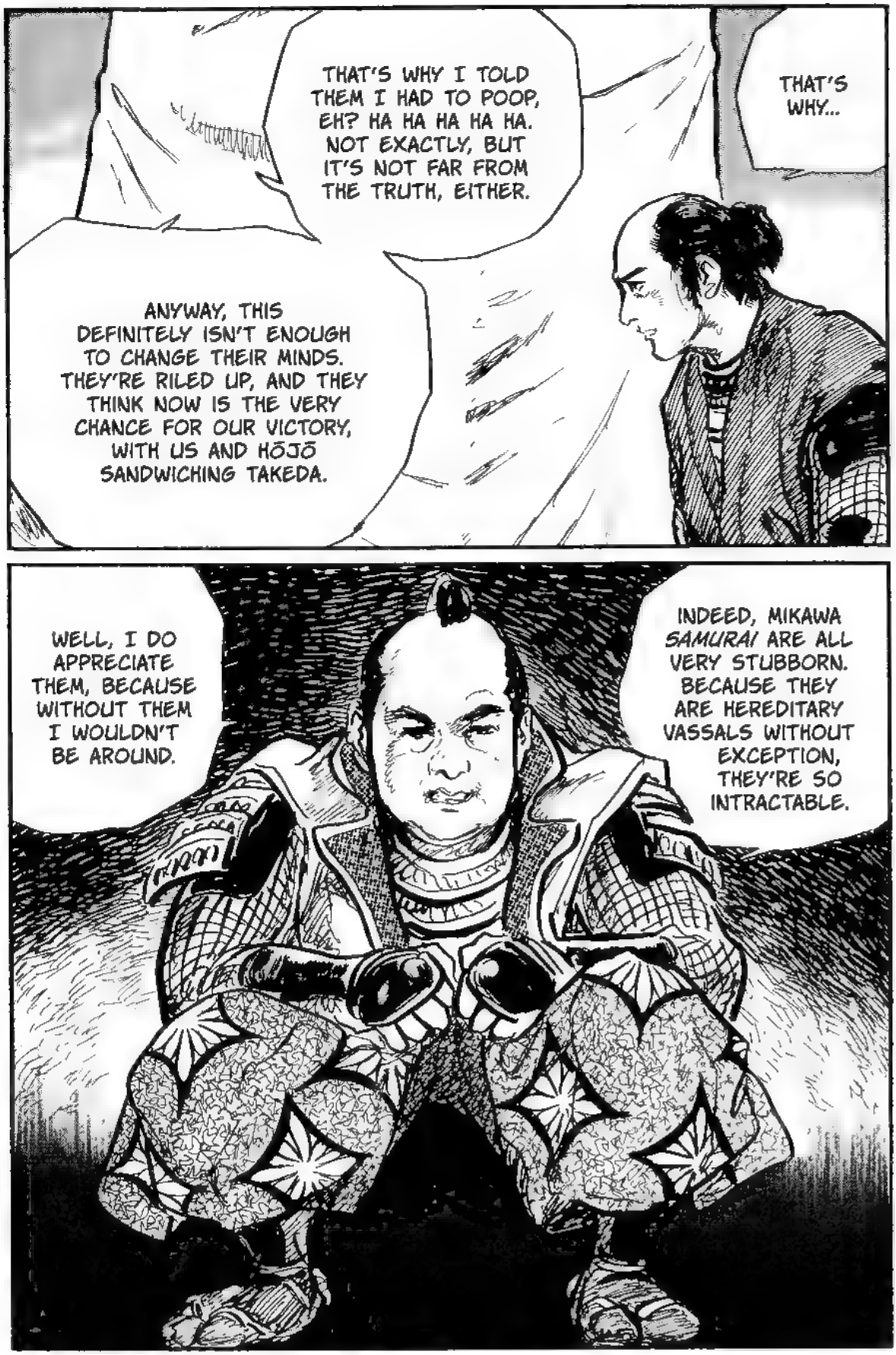
HŌJŌ FORCES ARE PRESSING SHINGEN FROM BEHIND. IT GIVES US GREAT ADVANTAGE.
MILORD!
NOW THAT IT'S COME TO THIS, INSTEAD OF STORMING KAKEGAWA, LET'S CHALLENGE TAKEDA WITH A DECISIVE BATTLE!
OH, I SEE!
I HAVE TO POOP.
I BET MILORD WILL NOT MAKE THAT MOVE.


POOPING, HUH? THAT'S JUST LIKE HIM. IT WORKED TO QUIET THEIR ARGUMENT.

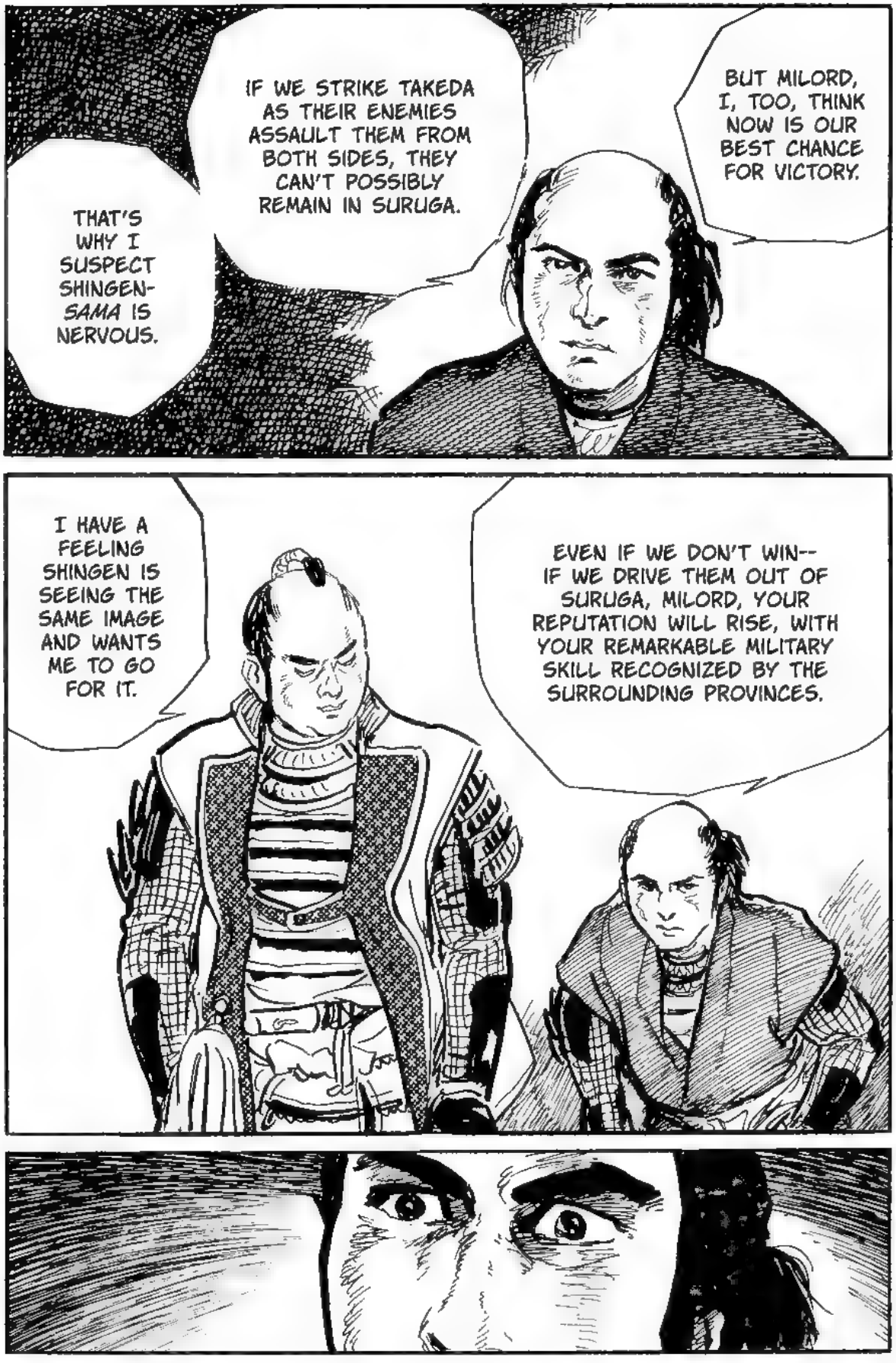
MMM...
BWAAT
SHINGEN IS PLOTTING PETTY TRICKS AGAINST ME.

NOBUNAGA-DONO, TOO, IS ABLE TO MARCH ON THE CAPITAL WITHOUT CONCERN BECAUSE I AM HERE, STEADFASTLY KEEPING OUR ALLIANCE.
HŌJŌ AND UESUGI ARE ALSO WATCHING MY EVERY MOVE.
AND THE MAN IS FEARED BY ALL AS THE TIGER OF KAI. IMAGINE.
REMEMBER, I WAS IMAGAWA'S HOSTAGE. I'M NOT THAT STRONG. I AM NOT A RENOWNED WARRIOR WITH GREAT VALOR. I DON'T EVEN OWN A LARGE TERRITORY, NOR DO I CONTROL MASSIVE ARMIES. YOU KNOW, HANZŌ.
AND NOW THINK OF UJIZANE. HE'S TREMBLING INSIDE KAKEGAWA CASTLE, FRIGHTENED BY MY MEREST SHADOW.
HEH HEH HEH. HOW STRANGE THAT IS.
BWAAT
BRAAP
YES, MILORD.
ARE YOU THERE?


SO LONG AS WE FOLLOW, IT LOOKS OUR WAY. IF NOT, IT TURNS FROM US.
IT'S UNBELIEVABLE IN SOME WAYS. SUCH LUCK IS A SCARY THING INDEED.
WHEN I THINK OF WHAT I HAVE TODAY, IT'S BECAUSE I'VE ENDURED, NEVER FIGHTING MY OWN LUCK.
ABOVE ALL ELSE, YOU CONSIDER TOMORROW. I'M ALWAYS IMPRESSED BY YOUR POWERS OF OBSERVATION.
MILORD, YOU ALSO HAVE STRENGTH.
EVERYONE WANTS TO TAKE A HARD LINE AGAINST TAKEDA. THEY'RE FANATIC ABOUT IT, AND UNITED IN THAT OPINION. EVEN IF YOU TRY TO DISSUADE THEM, MILORD, THEY WON'T CHANGE THEIR MINDS.
DON'T FLATTER ME, HANZŌ!


THAT'S WHY...
THAT'S WHY I TOLD THEM I HAD TO POOP, EH? HA HA HA HA HA. NOT EXACTLY, BUT IT'S NOT FAR FROM THE TRUTH, EITHER.
ANYWAY, THIS DEFINITELY ISN'T ENOUGH TO CHANGE THEIR MINDS. THEY'RE RILED UP, AND THEY THINK NOW IS THE VERY CHANCE FOR OUR VICTORY, WITH US AND HŌJŌ SANDWICHING TAKEDA.
INDEED, MIKAWA *SAMURAI* ARE ALL VERY STUBBORN. BECAUSE THEY ARE HEREDITARY VASSALS WITHOUT EXCEPTION, THEY'RE SO INTRACTABLE.
WELL, I DO APPRECIATE THEM, BECAUSE WITHOUT THEM I WOULDN'T BE AROUND.

LET ME WHISPER, HANZŌ.
I'D BETTER REMOVE A LITTLE MORE VENOM FROM THEM.


IF WE STRIKE TAKEDA AS THEIR ENEMIES ASSAULT THEM FROM BOTH SIDES, THEY CAN'T POSSIBLY REMAIN IN SURUGA.
BUT MILORD, I, TOO, THINK NOW IS OUR BEST CHANCE FOR VICTORY.
THAT'S WHY I SUSPECT SHINGEN-*SAMA* IS NERVOUS.
I HAVE A FEELING SHINGEN IS SEEING THE SAME IMAGE AND WANTS ME TO GO FOR IT.
EVEN IF WE DON'T WIN-- IF WE DRIVE THEM OUT OF SURUGA, MILORD, YOUR REPUTATION WILL RISE, WITH YOUR REMARKABLE MILITARY SKILL RECOGNIZED BY THE SURROUNDING PROVINCES.

OH.
WHEN THAT HAPPENS, WE'LL FACE HŌJŌ RIGHT THERE.
IF I STORM ALL THE WAY INTO SURUGA, SHINGEN WILL PULL BACK!
AND THAT MEANS THEY'LL HAVE NO QUALMS ABOUT CLASHING WITH US! AS SOON AS SHINGEN SEES US IN OPEN CONFLICT WITH HŌJŌ, HE'LL IMMEDIATELY RETURN LIKE WIND AND FIRE.
HŌJŌ TOOK UP ARMS TO RESCUE UJIZANE.
THE TAKEDA FORCES ARE AT A TERRIBLE DISADVANTAGE RIGHT NOW. WE WERE FAST, AND HŌJŌ WAS FASTER. A LOT FASTER THAN SHINGEN EVER ANTICIPATED. SO WHAT DID HE DO? HE CAME UP WITH A PLOT TO STALL US, AND IF IT WORKED PERFECTLY WE'D BE FIGHTING HŌJŌ INSTEAD!
.....

THAT'S HOW I SEE IT, BUT I COULD BE WRONG.
LISTEN, HANZŌ. TAKING CONTROL OF KAKEGAWA WITH NO EFFORT, OR STORMING INTO SURUGA ONLY TO FACE HŌJŌ. WHICH DO YOU THINK IS TO OUR BENEFIT?
I'LL SEND A MESSENGER WITH A PROTEST TO SHINGEN. MEANWHILE, I'LL STAY PUT! BESIDES, KAKEGAWA WILL FALL WITHOUT MUCH TROUBLE.
IF WE TELL UJIZANE WE'LL SPARE HIS LIFE, HE'LL HAND OVER HIS CASTLE.
YOU'LL TELL EVERY-ONE?

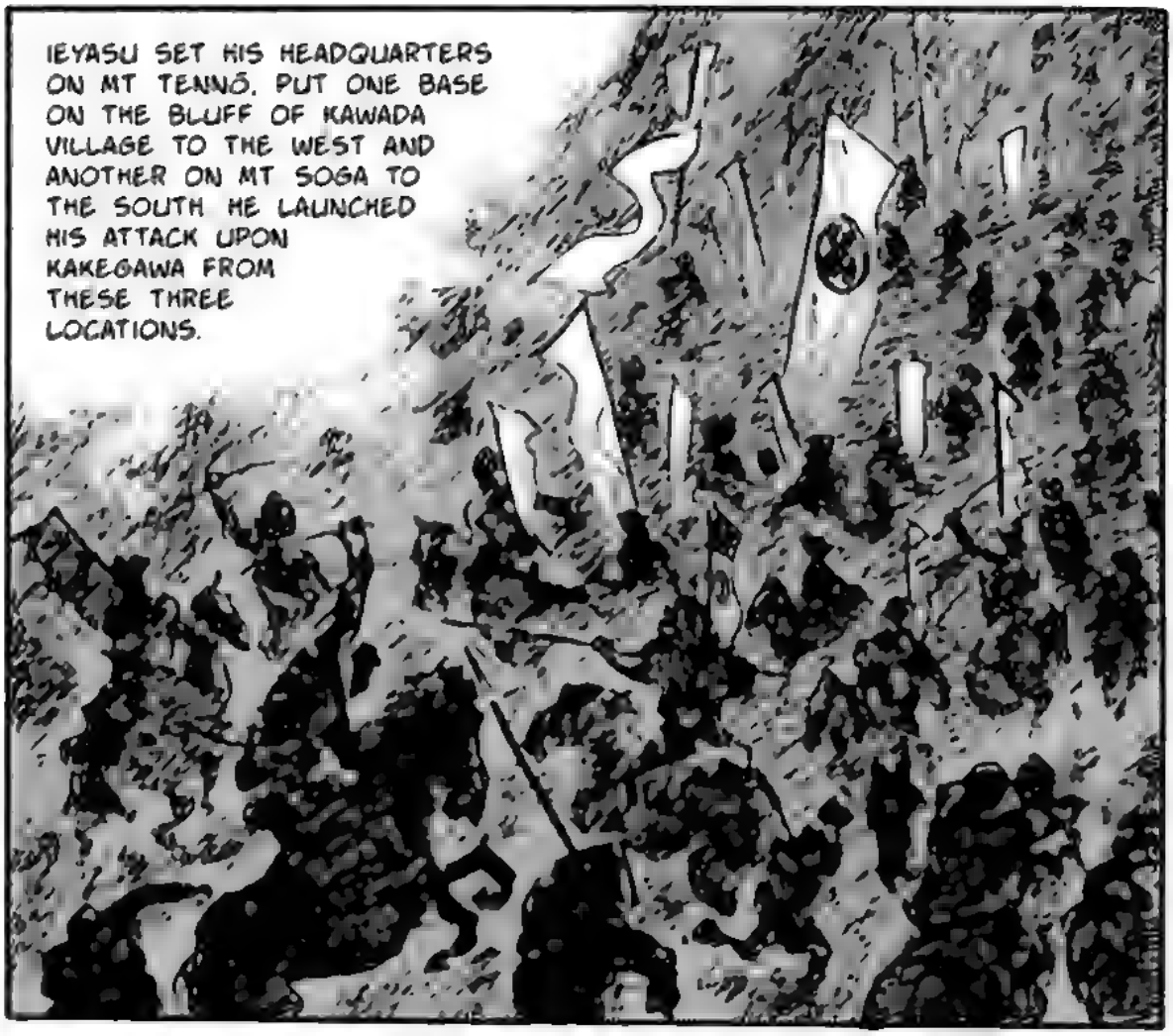
BECAUSE THEY HAVE A GUTLESS MASTER, THEY'VE WORKED DESPERATELY HARD. I MUST REMAIN A WEAKLING. AT LEAST FOR A LITTLE LONGER.
WE, ALL OF TOKUGAWA, HAVE BRAVE WARRIORS UNDER A FAINT-HEARTED MASTER. THAT'S WHY WE'RE STRONG.
LIKE MASTER, LIKE MEN, THEY SAY. BUT IN OUR CASE IT DOESN'T APPLY.
I'VE BEEN GETTING FAT LATELY. MY BODY FEELS HEAVY. IT EXHAUSTS ME TO SQUAT SO LONG TO GET THE POOP OUT.

HMM, LET ME TRY IT.
WHAT ABOUT TREE CLIMBING?
I'D BETTER LOSE SOME WEIGHT. IS THERE A GOOD EXERCISE FOR THAT?

IT'S... IT'S NO GOOD!
SKIP
SKIP
THOMP
WE'LL SEND A HARSH PROTEST FOR BREAKING THE TREATY!
WE'LL SEND A MESSENGER TO SHINGEN.
WHOOO. I'M TIRED.

DRMI
DRMI
DRMI
DRMI

DRM ド..
DRM ド..
DRM ド..
DRM ド..


IEYASU SET HIS HEADQUARTERS ON MT TENNŌ. PUT ONE BASE ON THE BLUFF OF KAWADA VILLAGE TO THE WEST AND ANOTHER ON MT SOGA TO THE SOUTH. HE LAUNCHED HIS ATTACK UPON KAKEGAWA FROM THESE THREE LOCATIONS.

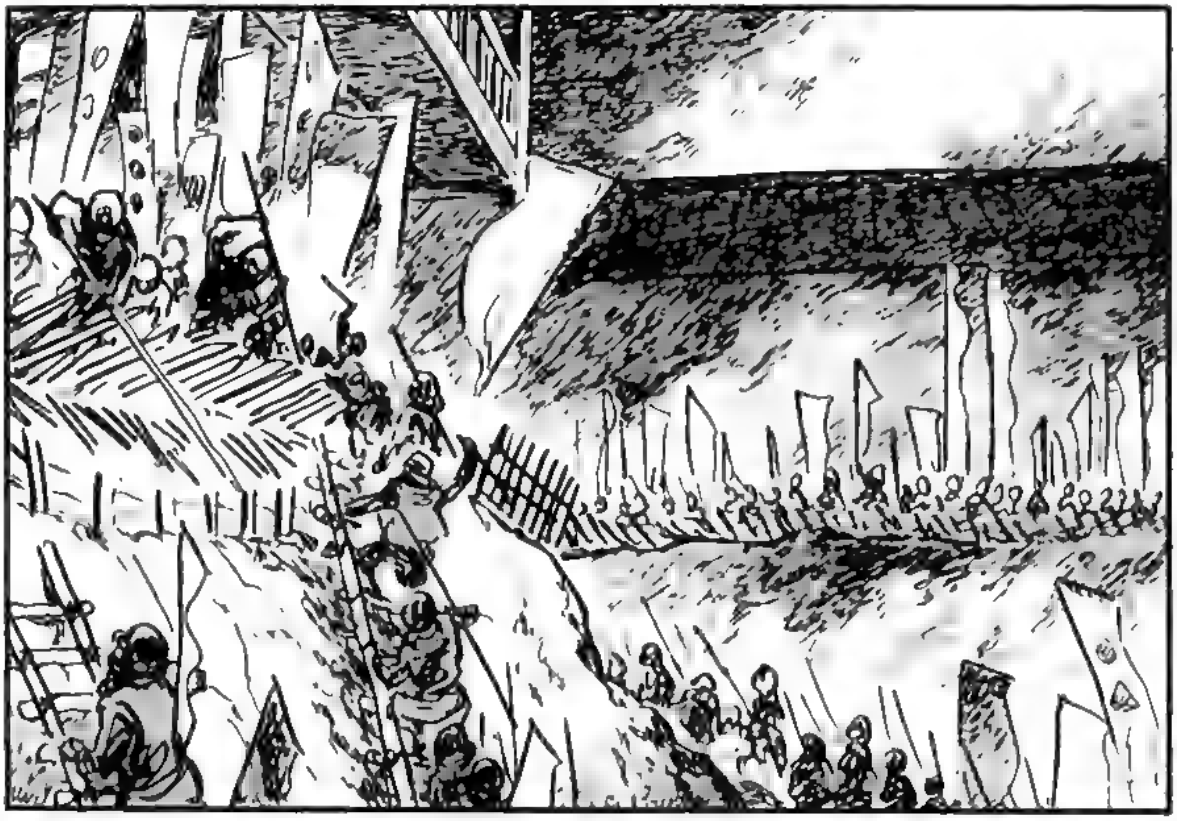
SHINGEN-SAMA'S MAN RELAYED THAT...
A MES-SAGE!

HE'S ALWAYS A FEW PACES AHEAD.
WHAT AN OLD *FOX* HE IS!
HE AGREES IEYASU-*SAMA* HAS GOOD REASON TO PROTEST, AND THEY'VE WITH-DRAWN AKIYAMA NOBUTOMO'S FORCES.
HE PROMISES THAT TAKEDA WILL NEVER INTERFERE WITH TOKUGAWA SOLDIERS AGAIN, SO PLEASE GO ALL-OUT AND STORM KAKEGAWA CASTLE!
NOW I KNOW WHY AKIYAMA NOBUTOMO STRUCK. I FINALLY FIGURED OUT.
THERE'S ANOTHER REASON ON TOP OF WHAT I ALREADY DISCERNED.
HE ACCEPTED MY PROTEST EASILY, PULLED BACK AKIYAMA'S TROOPS AND PROMISED NEVER TO HINDER US AGAIN. BY SO DOING, HE NOT ONLY MAKES US FEEL RELIEVED BUT ALSO FOCUSES OUR ENTIRE EFFORT ON ATTACKING KAKEGAWA!

THAT'S WHY WE ADVISED YOU TO ATTACK, MILORD! IT'S NOT TOO LATE YET!
HE WAS WORRIED THAT HE MIGHT FIND HIMSELF BETWEEN TWO FIRES, US AND HŌJŌ! THAT'S WHY HE TOOK HIS PRE-CAUTIONS.
WHAT SHINGEN FEARED WAS THAT WE'D STORM STRAIGHT INTO SURUGA EN ROUTE TO MITSUKE WITH-OUT STRIKING KAKEGAWA FIRST!
HA HA HA HA
IF WE PRESS TAKEDA NOW, WE MIGHT BE ABLE TO BEAT THEM. SHINGEN HAS HŌJŌ BEHIND HIM, PUTTING HIM IN A WEAK POSITION AND MAKING HIM FRET. THAT'S WHY HE'S USING DIRTY TRICKS, I THOUGHT.
YOU ALL THINK SO, DON'T YOU? I THOUGHT SO TOO!

ONCE THAT HAPPENED, SHINGEN WOULD COME RIGHT BACK.
WHY DIDN'T I STRIKE TAKEDA THEN? BECAUSE SHINGEN WOULD RETREAT, AND WE'D CLASH WITH HŌJŌ!
THEY MEAN TO TAKE POSITION HERE AFTER POUNDING ON US.
I WAS WRONG! TAKEDA'S ARMIES ARE WAITING FOR US TO STRIKE. THEY'RE LYING IN WAIT!
AH HA HA HA HA.
THEY'RE READY TO COME THIS WAY WITH CRUSHING FORCE.

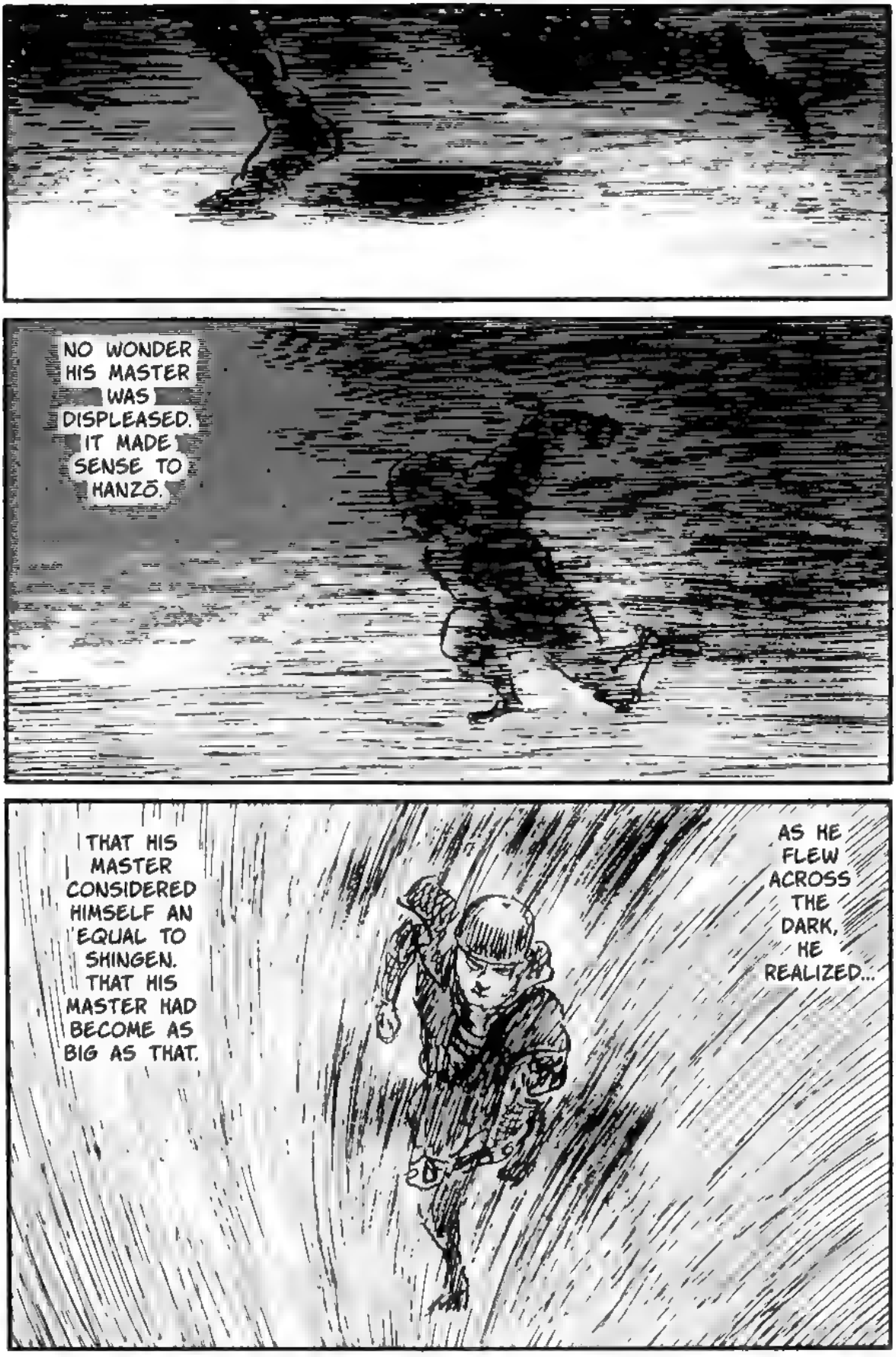
AKIYAMA'S ATTACK WAS NONE OTHER THAN HIS BAIT!
HŌJŌ MOVING UP BEHIND HIM IS NOT ON SHINGEN'S MIND! BY BEING FLANKED ON BOTH SIDES, HE'S MADE IT APPEAR THEY'RE VULNERABLE, BUT IN TRUTH HE'S JUST TEMPTING US!
HIS FLAG MARK, *FŪRINKAZAN!* HOW *TERRIFYING* IT IS!
LISTEN! DO NOT BE DISTRACTED! WE MUST TAKE OVER KAKEGAWA CASTLE BEFORE EVERYTHING!!



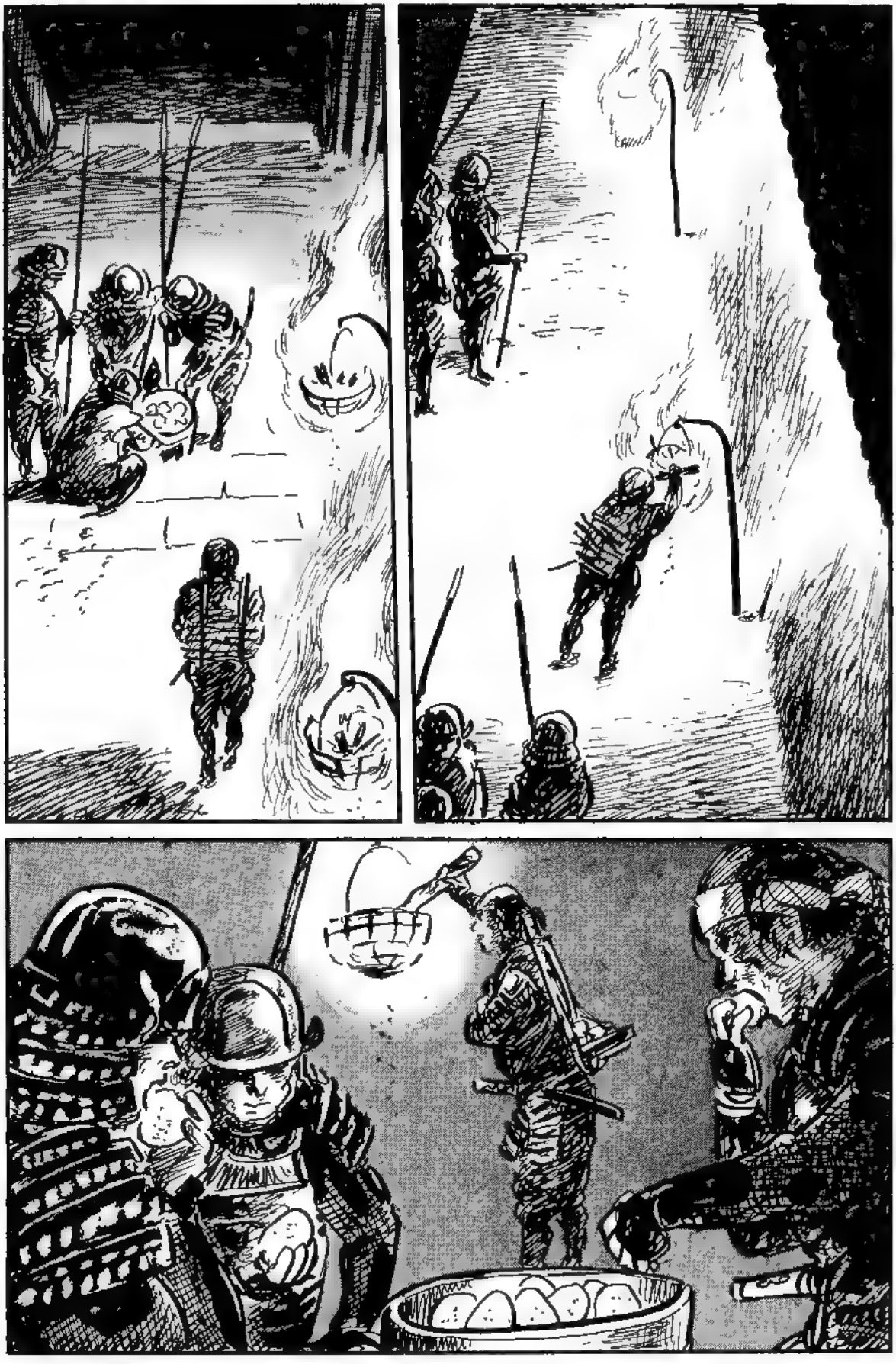
HOW DOGGED THAT UJIZANE IS!
IF WE ONLY CONTINUE OUR SIEGE, THEY'LL SURRENDER IN DUE COURSE.
BUT THERE'S NO NEED TO WORRY.
THEY'RE ALSO DESPERATE. IT WILL PROBABLY TAKE ABOUT A MONTH BEFORE WE CAPTURE THIS PLACE.
IMAGAWA MAY BE ROTTING, BUT EVEN STILL, YOU KNOW WHAT THEY ARE.

HANZŌ WONDERED WHY HIS MASTER LOOKED SO DISPLEASED WHEN THEY WERE ATTACKING WITH OVERWHELMING AND SUPERIOR FORCE.
UJIZANE DESERTED SUNPU EASILY, BUT NOW HE RESISTS ADAMANTLY INSIDE KAKEGAWA!
YES SIR.
HANZŌ!
DO YOU KNOW WHAT THAT MEANS?! HE'S AFRAID OF SHINGEN, BUT NOT ME! HE THINKS I'M NOTHING MUCH TO WORRY ABOUT.

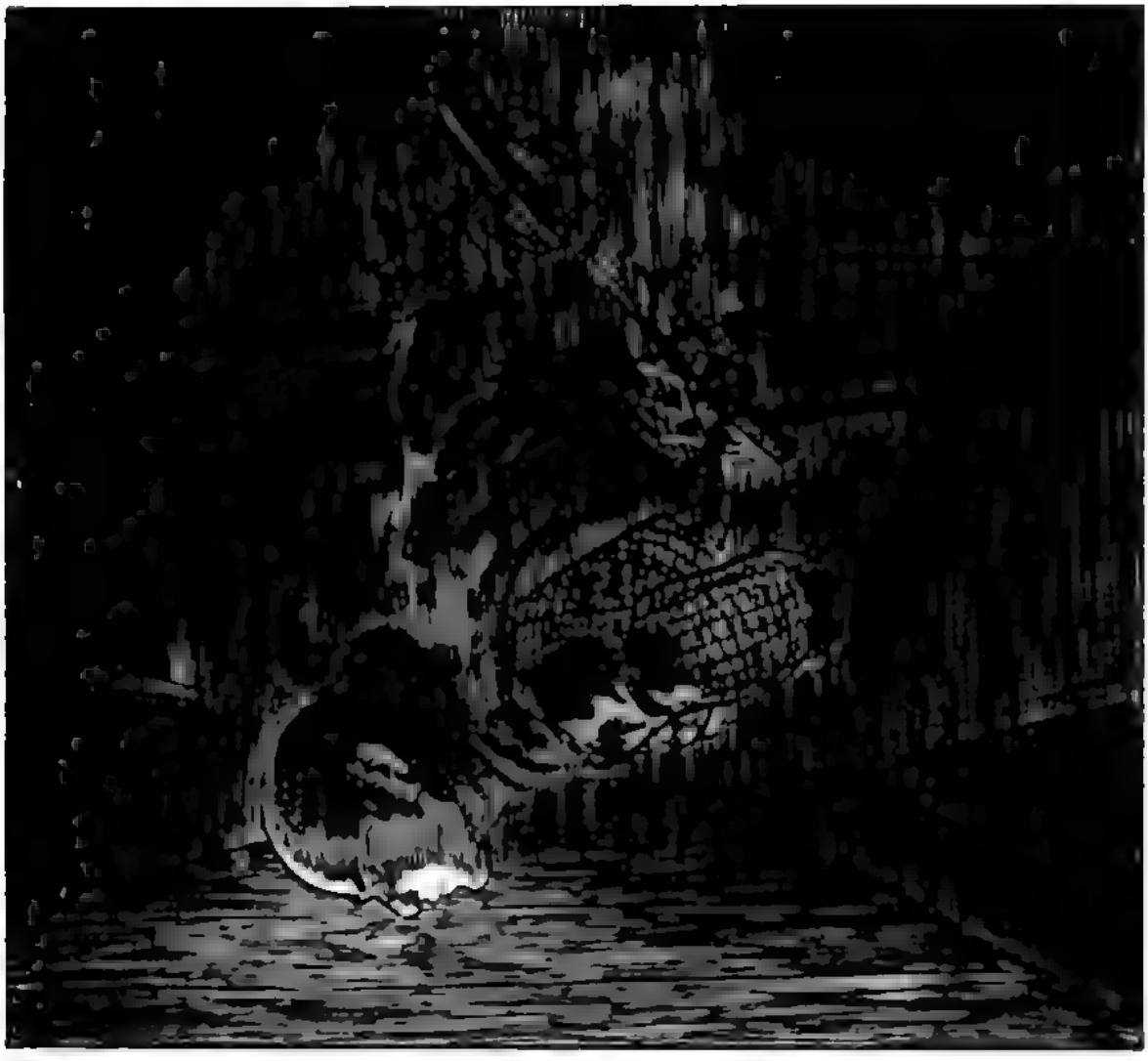
I THOUGHT THAT WITH A LITTLE PUSH UJIZANE WOULD RUN FROM ME TOO.
THAT'S WHY UJIZANE FLED FROM SHINGEN WITH NO RESISTANCE BUT DEFIES ME SO DESPERATELY! I MISCALCULATED.
HANZŌ!
YES SIR.
I BET SOME OF MY VASSALS ALREADY THINK SO. I CAN'T HAVE THIS DRAG ON.
THIS MAY BE REMEMBERED FOREVER AS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ME AND SHINGEN!
YES SIR.
JUST *SCARE* THAT BASTARD!
STEAL INTO THE CASTLE AND FRIGHTEN UJIZANE. I DON'T CARE WHAT METHOD YOU CHOOSE!

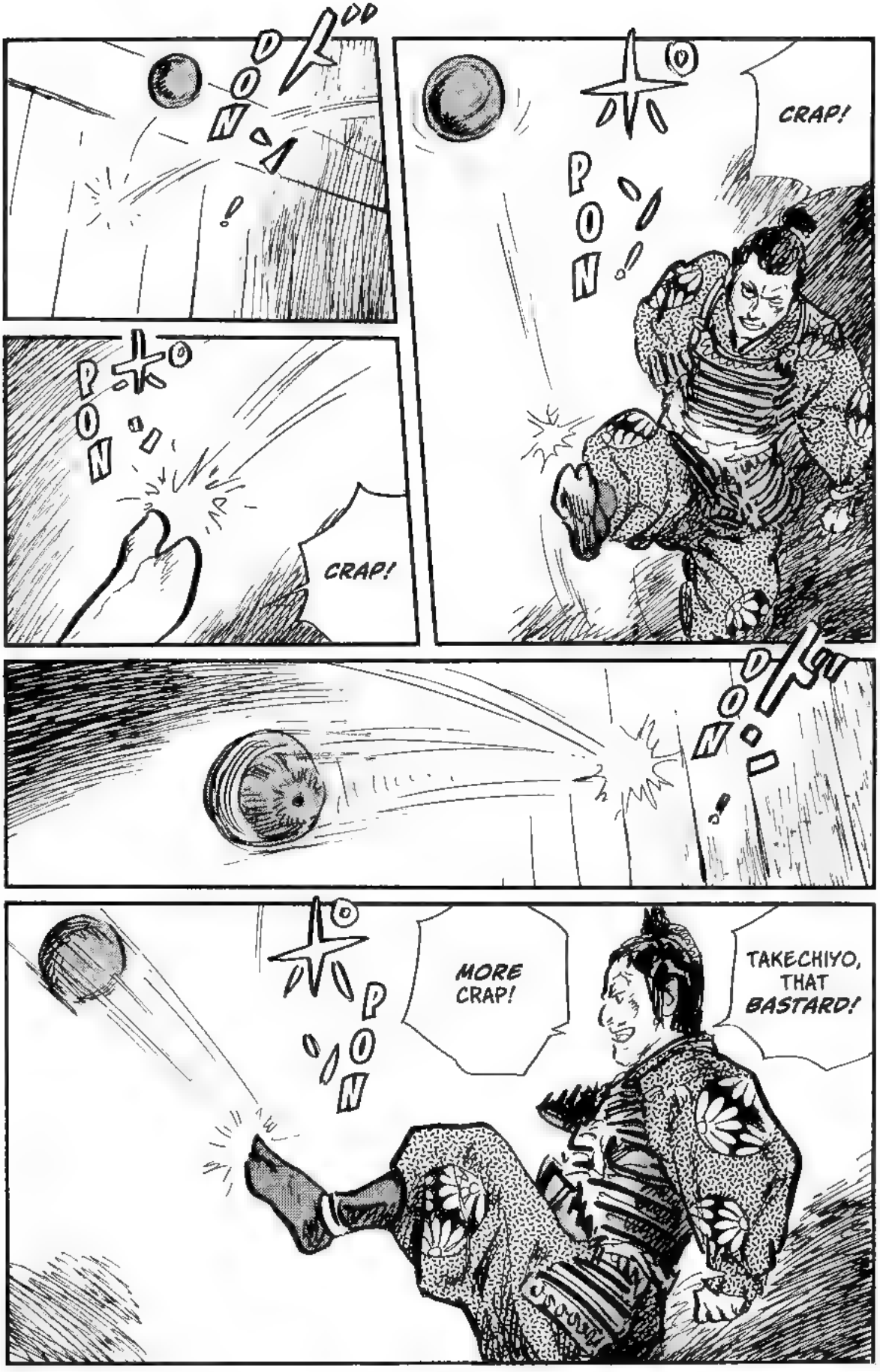

NO WONDER HIS MASTER WAS DISPLEASED. IT MADE SENSE TO HANZŌ.
THAT HIS MASTER CONSIDERED HIMSELF AN EQUAL TO SHINGEN. THAT HIS MASTER HAD BECOME AS BIG AS THAT.
AS HE FLEW ACROSS THE DARK, HE REALIZED...

HIS MASTER HAD BEEN A HOSTAGE WITHOUT A PROVINCE OF HIS OWN...
HANZŌ THOUGHT THIS *GUIQULAI* WAS LIKE A DREAM. POSITIONS HAD BEEN SWAPPED, AND THEY PROSPERED WHILE THEIR ENEMY DECLINED.
TOGETHER THEY'D LEFT IMAGAWA, AND NOW, TOGETHER, THEY'D RETURNED.



YOU'RE RIGHT...?!
OH, YEAH, OF COURSE...
HE'S ONE OF THE GUYS WHO CAME WITH UJIZANE-SAMA FROM SUNPU.
WHO WAS THAT JUST NOW?




POOOON!
CRAP!
PON!
PON!
CRAP!
POOOON!
MORE CRAP!
PON
TAKECHIYO, THAT BASTARD!

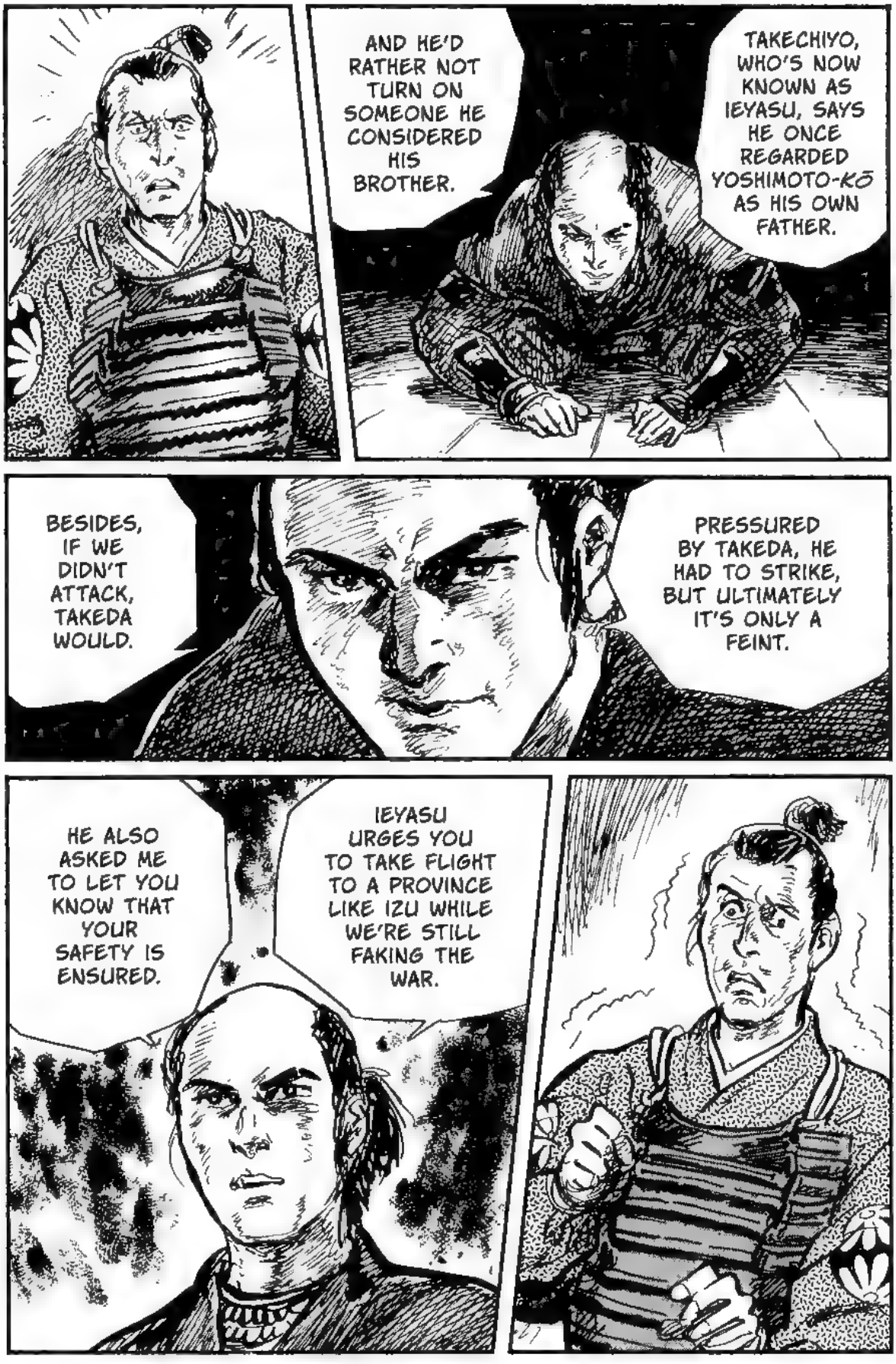
STUPID BASTARD! HIS WIFE IS NO MORE THAN MY OLD MISTRESS!
THAT TAKE-CHIYO!
HOW DARE HE RISE AGAINST ME!
KON
HOW SHOULD I FRIGHTEN HIM...
HMM...

DON
TAKECHIYO !!
SHAA !
THAT TURD !!
SHANG
WHAM !

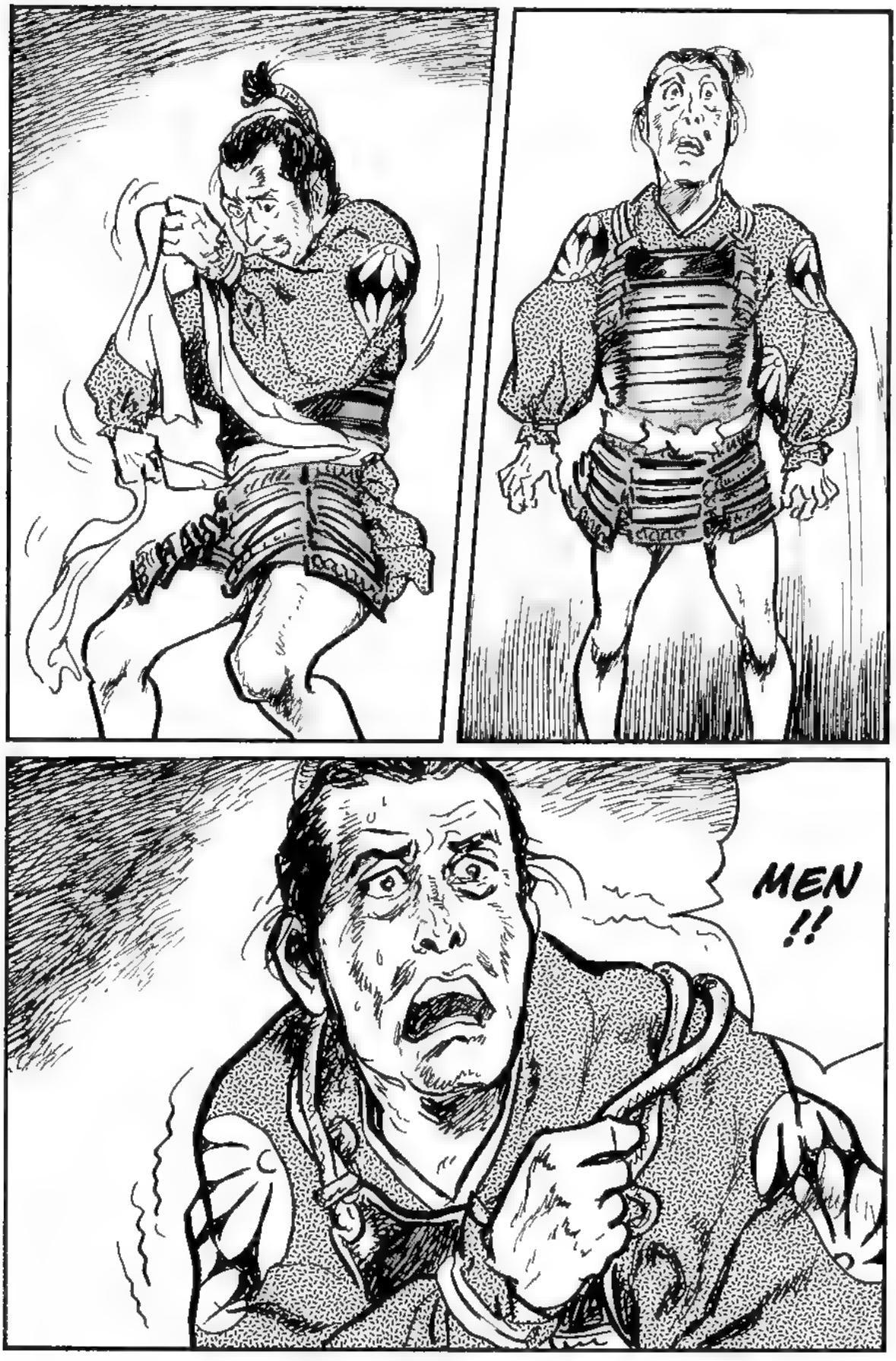
HMMM.
IN FACT, WORDS MIGHT ONLY ADD OIL TO THE FIRE!
IT'S BAD...HE'S COMPLETELY LOST IN HIS RAGE... NO WORDS WILL WORK.
おぉぉぉぉぉぉ
おぉぉぉぉぉぉ
おぉぉぉぉぉぉ
おぉぉぉぉぉぉ

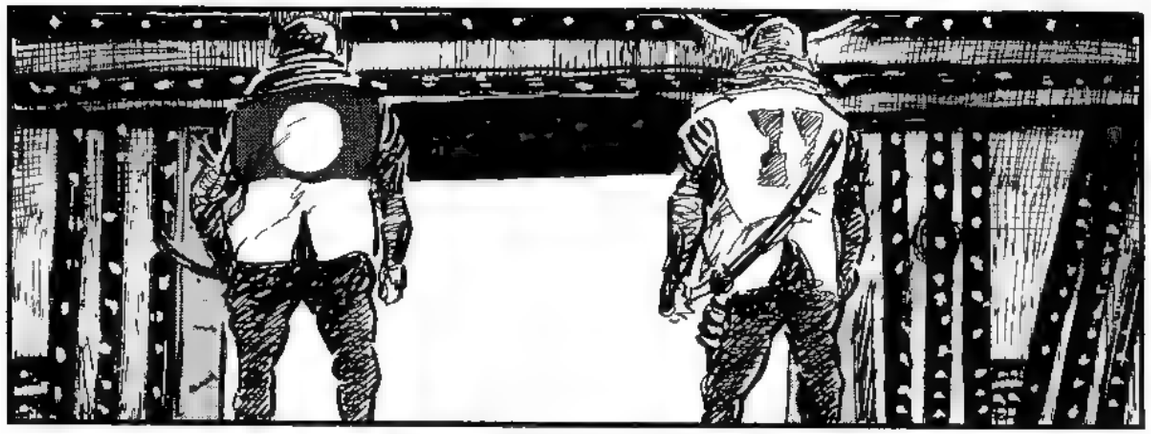
AHHH
AHHH
OHHH!
TAKECHIYO!! I DID THIS TO YOUR WIFE! I DID!
LONG AGO!!
OHHH!

MM.
UJIZANE-SAMA.
WHOA!
I AM HATTORI HANZŌ, A SERVANT OF THE VERY TAKECHIYO YOU SPEAK OF.


AND HE'D RATHER NOT TURN ON SOMEONE HE CONSIDERED HIS BROTHER.
TAKECHIYO, WHO'S NOW KNOWN AS IEYASU, SAYS HE ONCE REGARDED YOSHIMOTO-KŌ AS HIS OWN FATHER.
BESIDES, IF WE DIDN'T ATTACK, TAKEDA WOULD.
PRESSURED BY TAKEDA, HE HAD TO STRIKE, BUT ULTIMATELY IT'S ONLY A FEINT.
HE ALSO ASKED ME TO LET YOU KNOW THAT YOUR SAFETY IS ENSURED.
IEYASU URGES YOU TO TAKE FLIGHT TO A PROVINCE LIKE IZU WHILE WE'RE STILL FAKING THE WAR.

PUSH IS ABOUT TO COME TO SHOVE.
PLEASE HURRY.
IS... IS THAT WHAT'S GOING ON...?
TA... TAKECHI-YO...
JUST LIKE THAT MOUSE, UJIZANE INSTANTLY RETURNED TO HIS OLD SELF.
WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A CORNERED MOUSE IS GIVEN AN ESCAPE ROUTE? NATURALLY, ITS FIGHTING SPIRIT VANISHES.


MEN
!!



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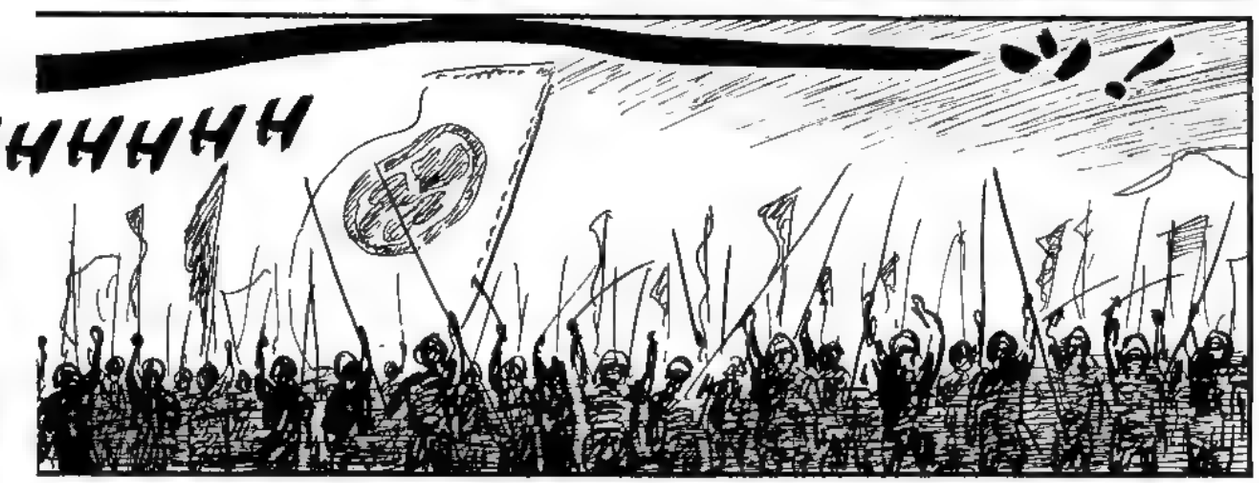

お
YAHHHHH
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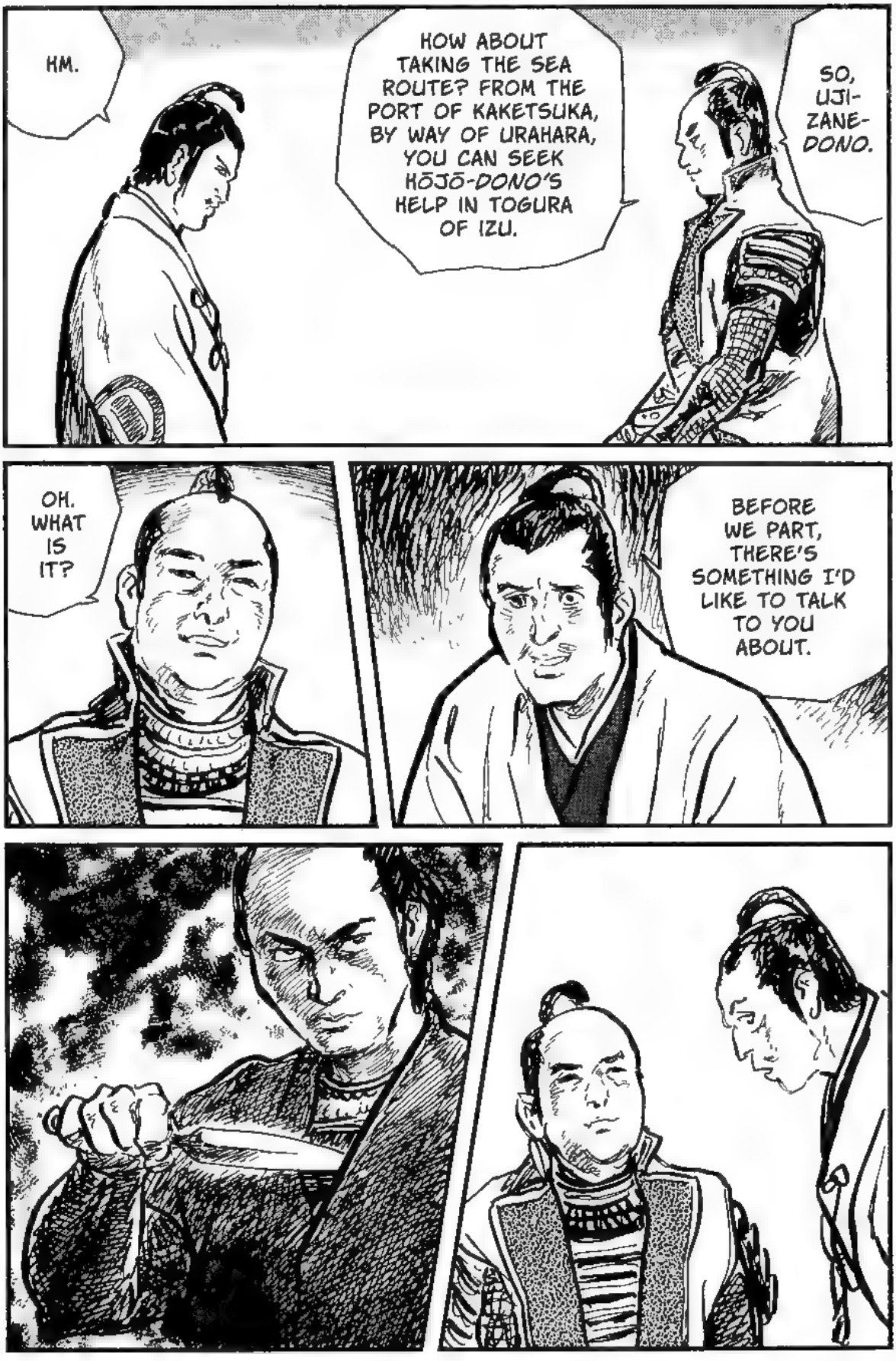
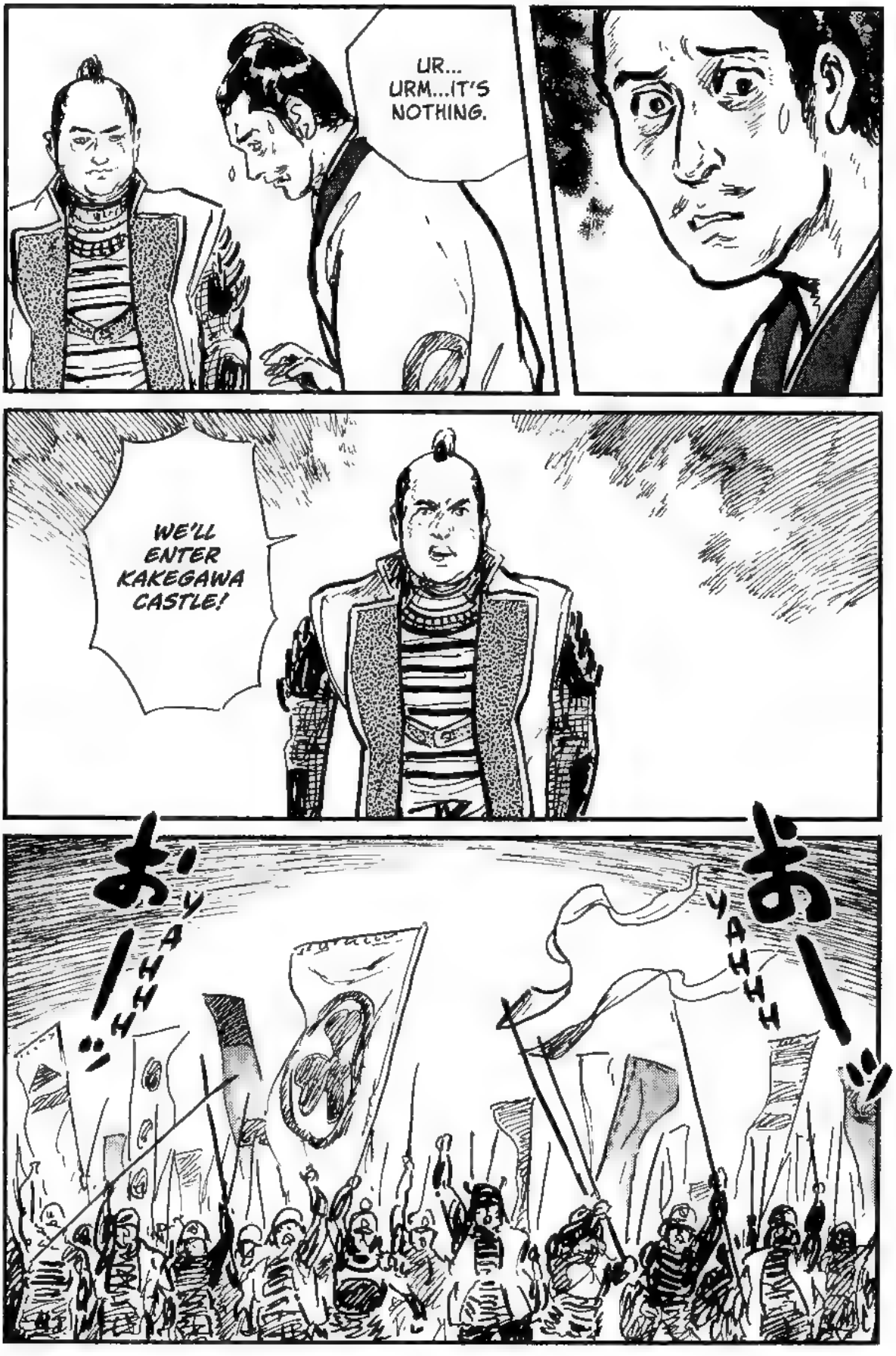
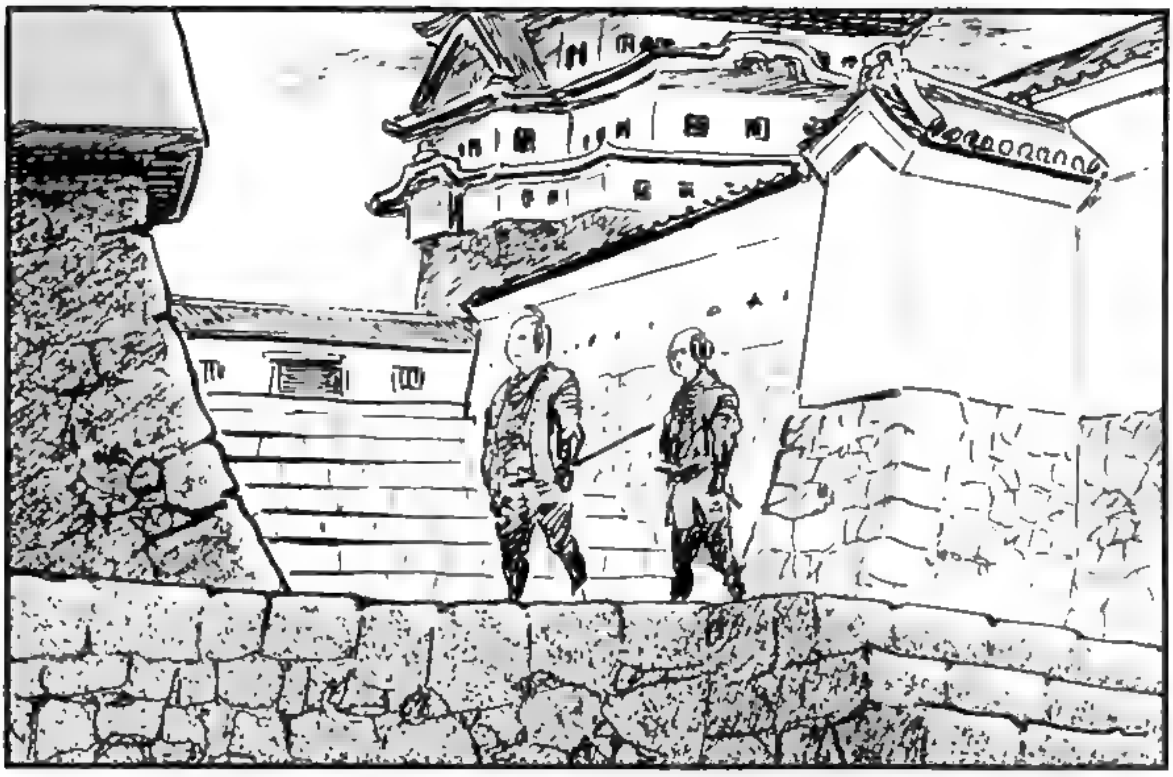
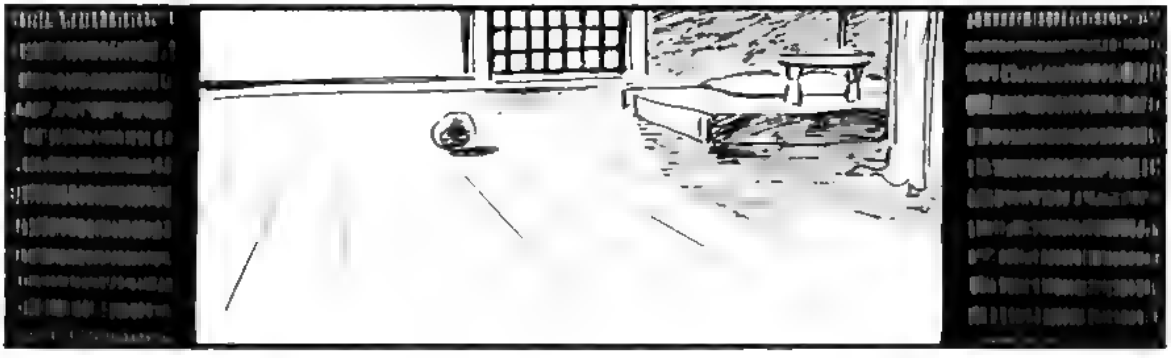
YAHHHH

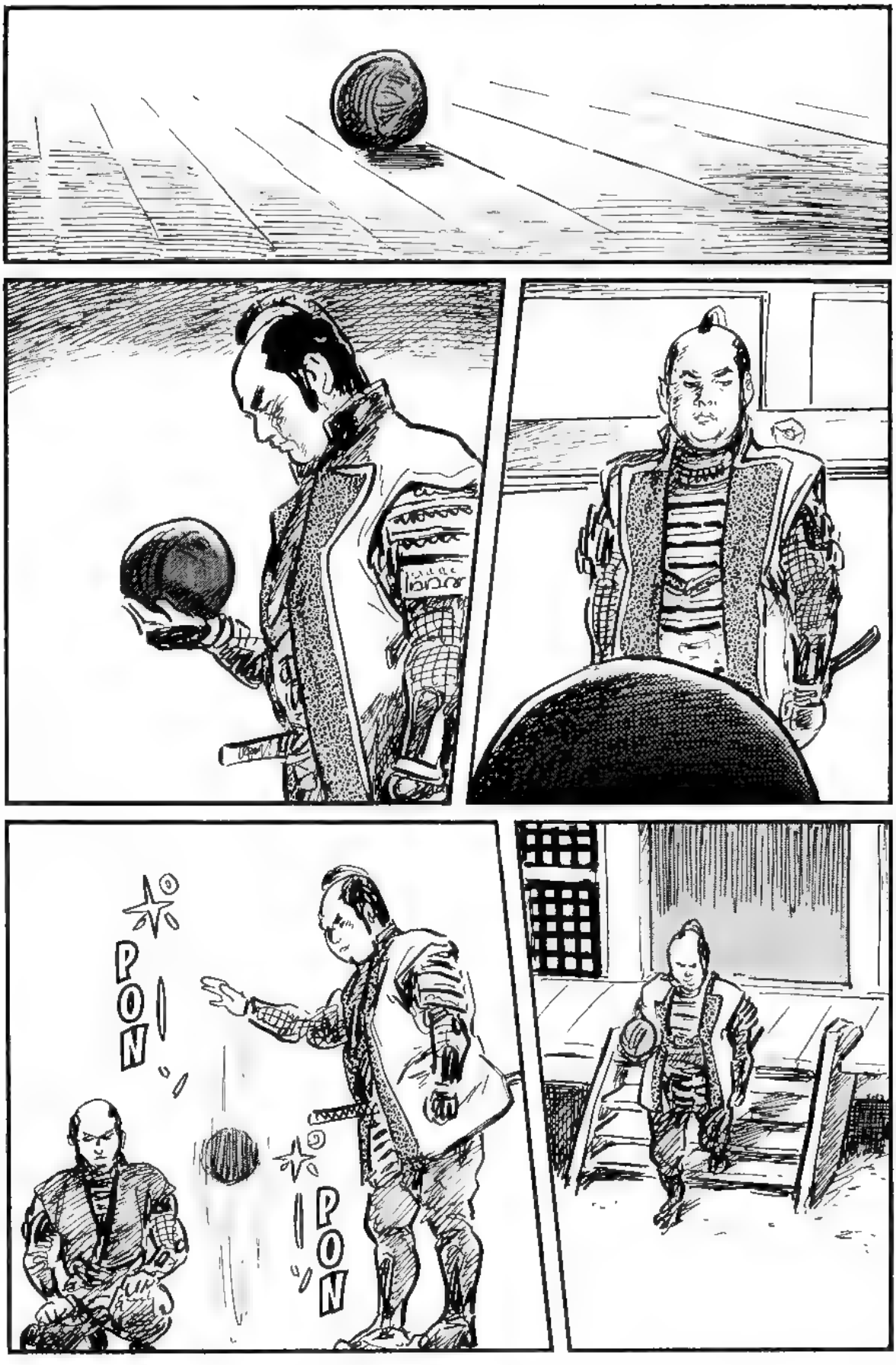
UJIZANE-
DONO.
IT'S BEEN
A LONG
TIME.

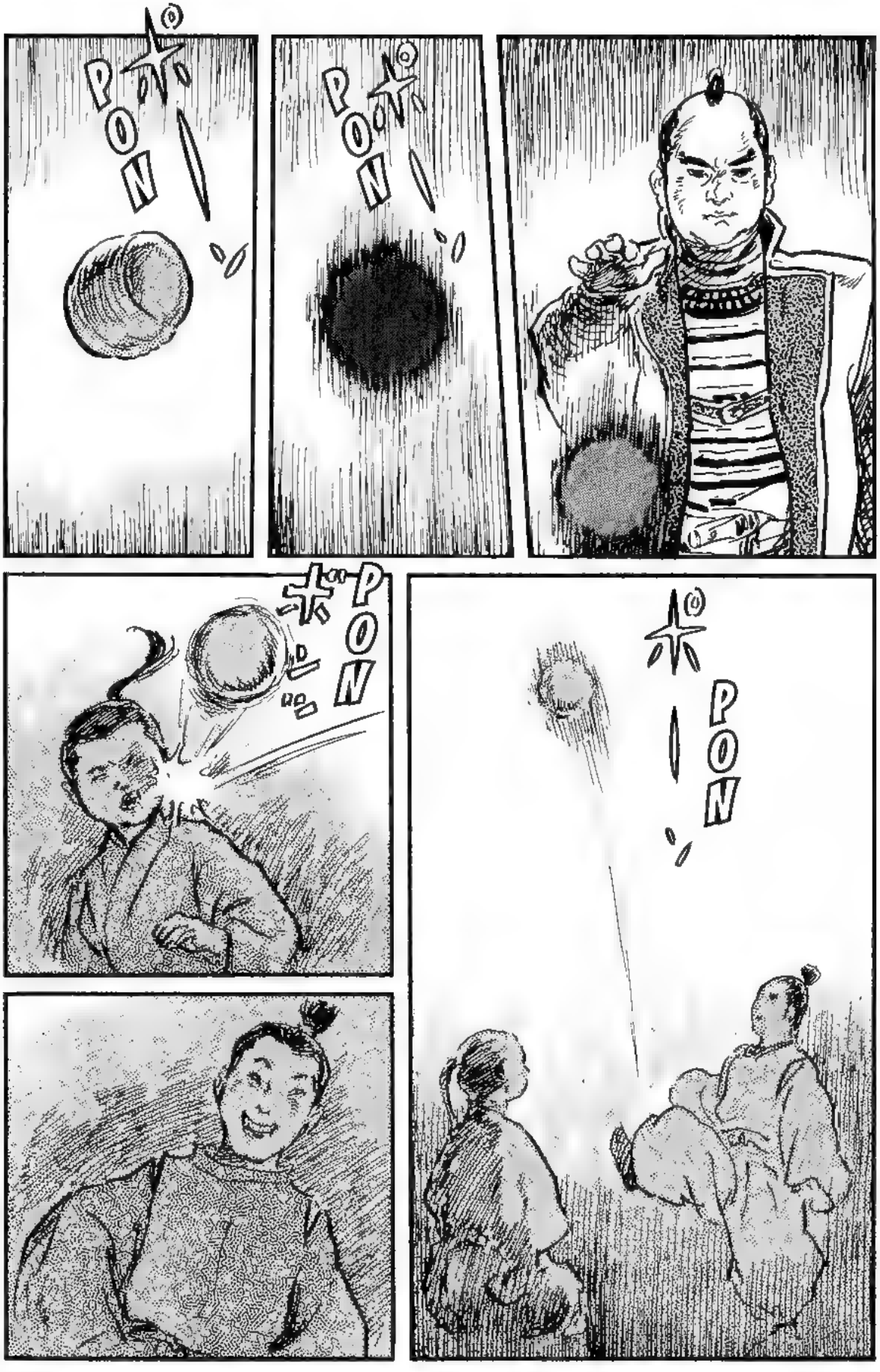

HM.
HOW ABOUT TAKING THE SEA ROUTE? FROM THE PORT OF KAKETSUKA, BY WAY OF URAHARA, YOU CAN SEEK KŌJŌ-DONO'S HELP IN TOGURA OF IZU.
SO, UJI-ZANE-DONO.
OH. WHAT IS IT?
BEFORE WE PART, THERE'S SOMETHING I'D LIKE TO TALK TO YOU ABOUT.


UR...
URM...IT'S
NOTHING.
WE'LL
ENTER
KAKEGAWA
CASTLE!
おー!
YAHHH
おー!
YAHHH






PON!
PON!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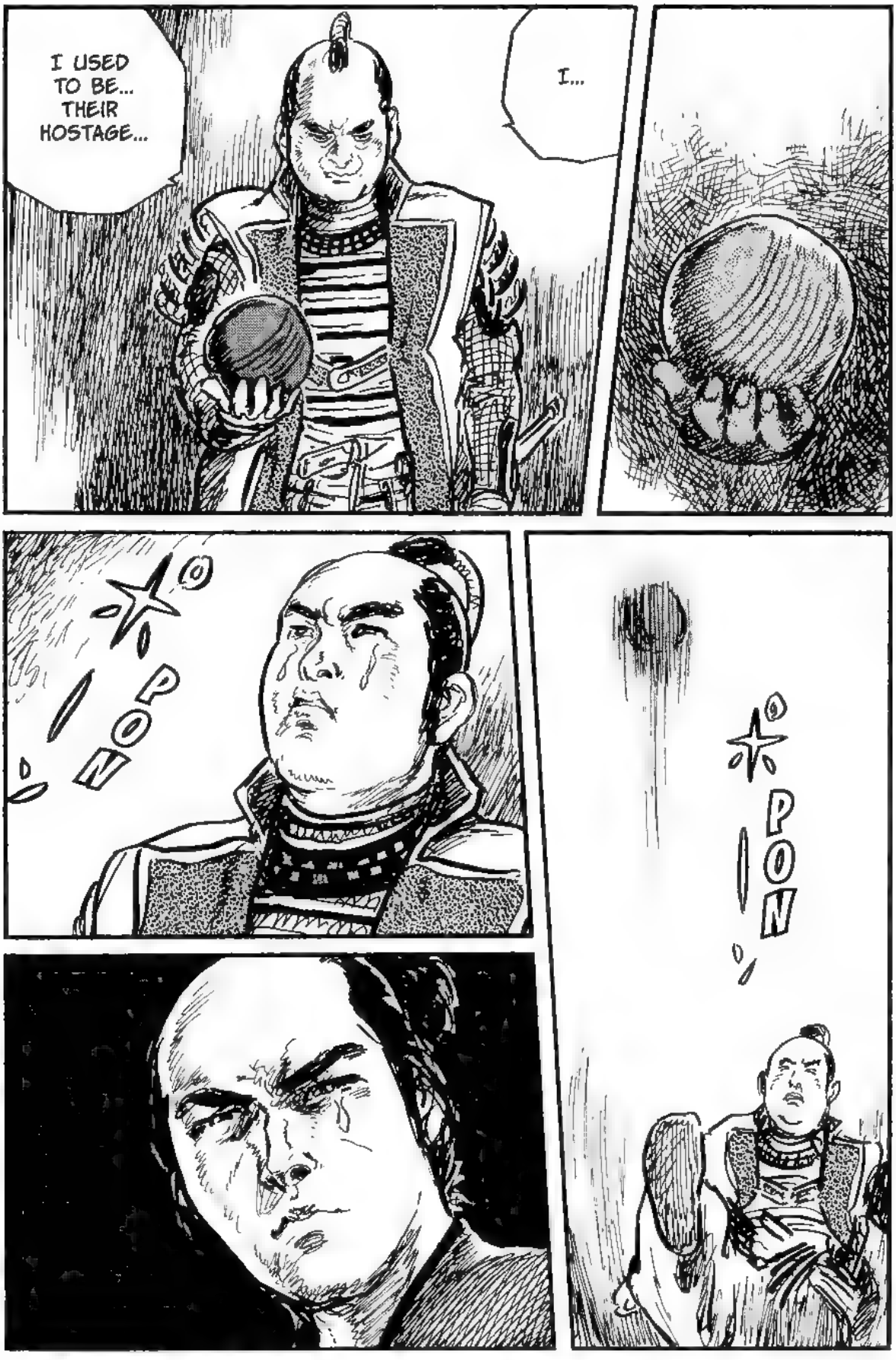
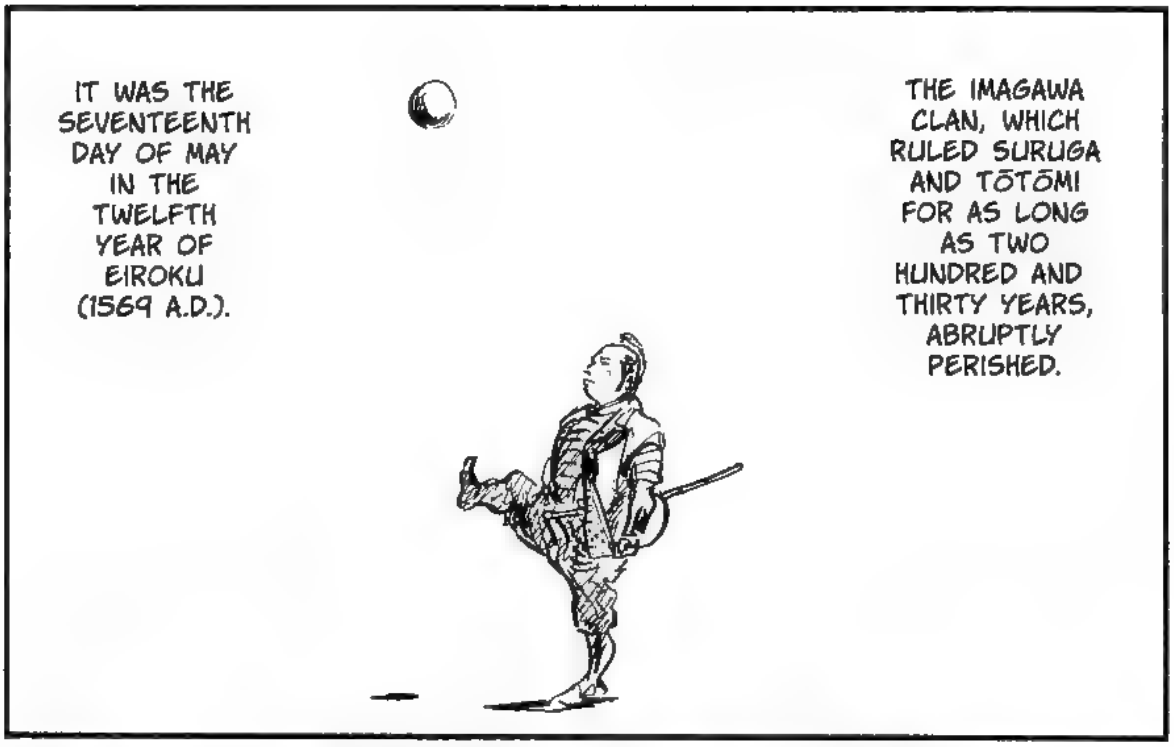
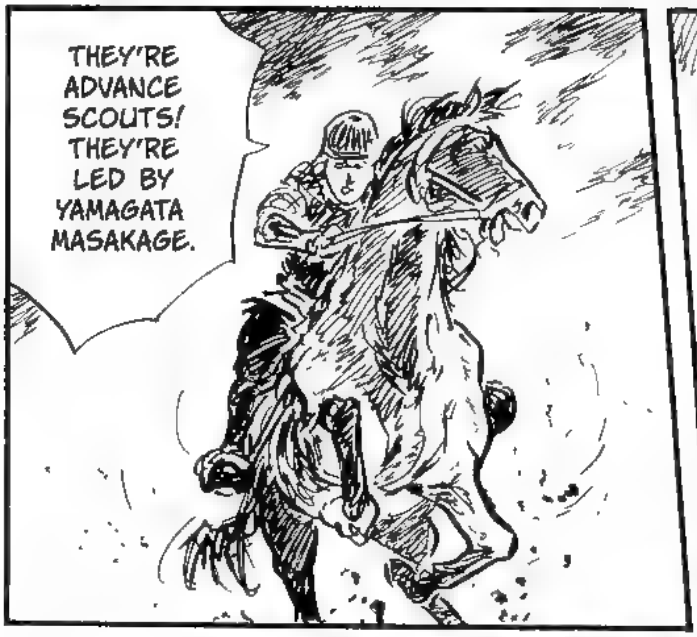
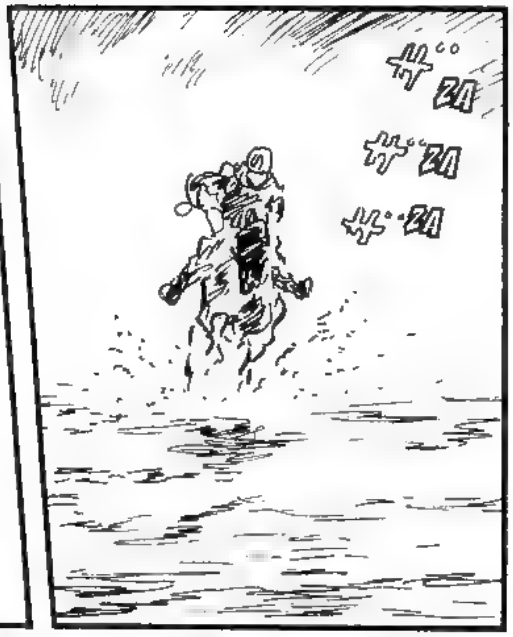

I USED TO BE... THEIR HOSTAGE...
I...
POI
PON


IT WAS THE SEVENTEENTH DAY OF MAY IN THE TWELFTH YEAR OF EIROKU (1569 A.D.).
THE IMAGAWA CLAN, WHICH RULED SURUGA AND TŌTŌMI FOR AS LONG AS TWO HUNDRED AND THIRTY YEARS, ABRUPTLY PERISHED.

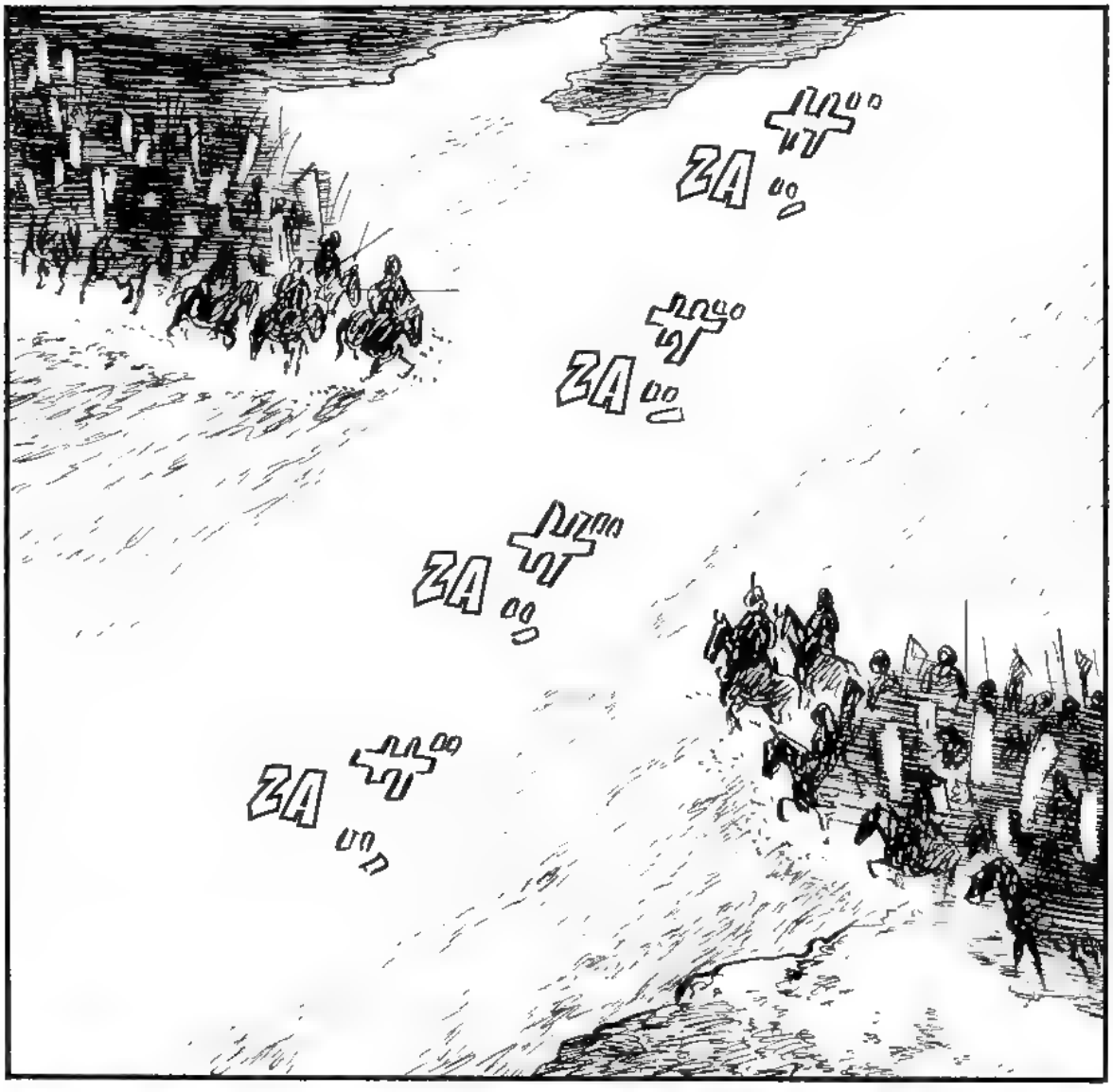
THE FOLLOWING DAY, EARLY IN THE MORNING, IEYASU DECIDED TO PATROL THE AREA NEAR ŌI RIVER, TAKING WITH HIM A CAVALRY TROOP OF A HUNDRED AND FIFTY MEN.

ZA
ZA
ZA
ZA
EXCUSE ME!
THOSE ARE TAKEDA TROOPS OVER THERE.


THEY'RE ADVANCE SCOUTS! THEY'RE LED BY YAMAGATA MASAKAGE.



THAT'S A LOT OF SCOUTS.
THERE ARE THREE HUNDRED.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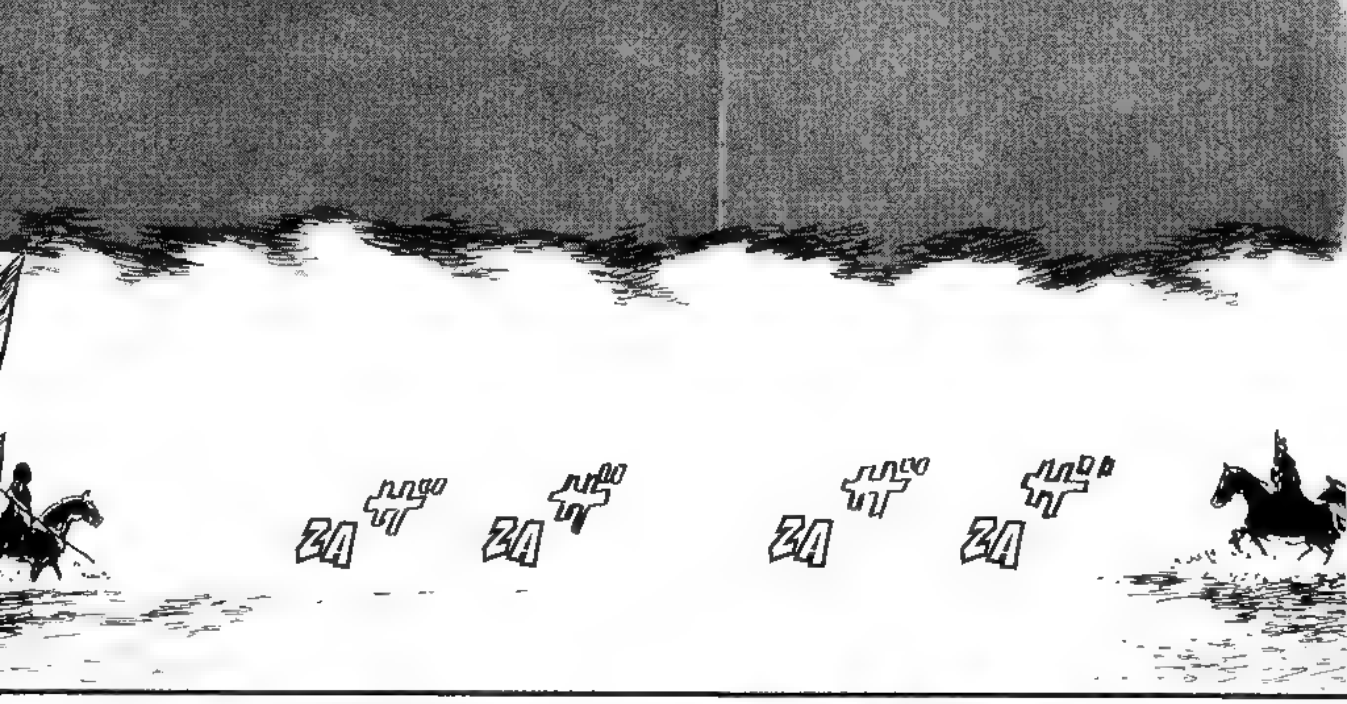
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THEY'RE PROBABLY THE MOST POWERFUL UNIT IN TAKEDA.
HM. YAMAGATA MASAKAGE'S LANCERS, I SEE.

NO...THEY WOULDN'T...
WE'RE A HUNDRED AND FIFTY, WHILE THEY'RE THREE HUNDRED. IF THEY ATTACK, WHAT WILL YOU DO, HANZŌ?

IF THEY ATTACK, THEY'LL DO IT FROM BEHIND AFTER WE GO PAST.
LAST NIGHT'S FRIEND IS TODAY'S ENEMY. IT'S POSSIBLE FOR SHINGEN TO BE THAT KIND OF FRIEND.

UH-HUH. LEAVING US THE BURDEN OF CROSSING THE WATER AND CUTTING OFF OUR ESCAPE, THEY'LL CHARGE AFTER US LIKE MAD.

ZA
ZA

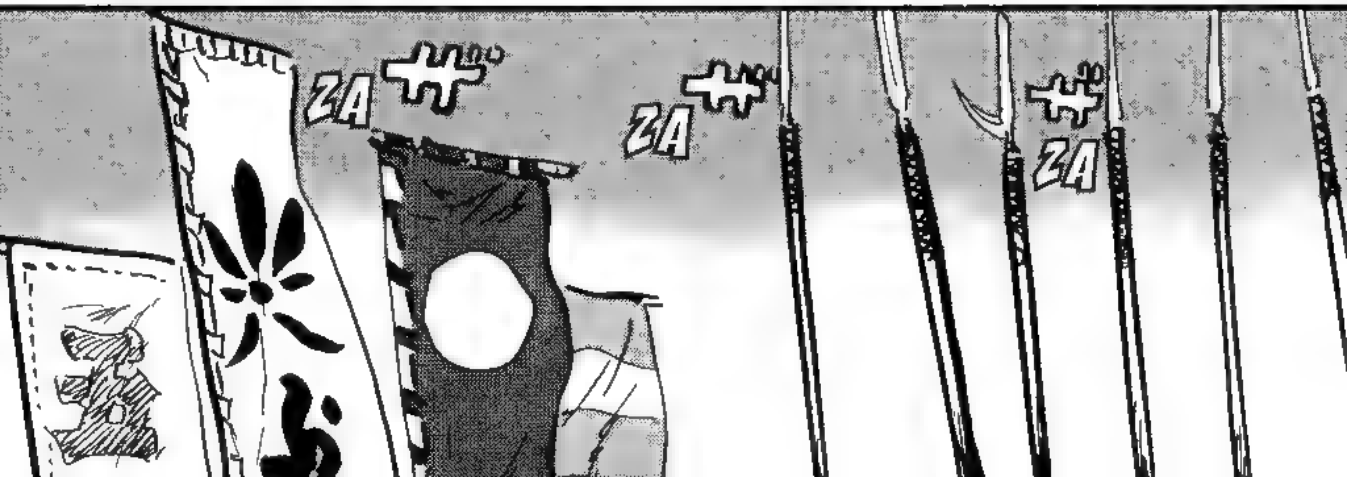
ZA
ZA
ZA
ZA
ZA
ZA
I'D SAY THIS IS EXACTLY WHAT'S CALLED THE OPPORTUNITY OF A LIFETIME.
THERE ARE A HUNDRED AND FIFTY OF THEM. WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO DO?

TAKE YOUR FEET OUT OF YOUR STIRRUPS AND SHOW RESPECT, TO LOWER THEIR GUARD!
WE'LL STRIKE AFTER WE RIDE BY!

THEY WILL, PRECISELY BECAUSE THEY ARE.
THEY'RE SALUTING. THEY PROBABLY WON'T ATTACK!
THEN WE'LL TURN AND COUNTER-ATTACK ONCE THEY'RE BACK IN THE WATER.
THE INSTANT THEY MOVE PAST, CHARGE TO THE OPPOSITE BANK WITH ALL YOUR MIGHT!
はYES SIR!!
THAT WILL REVERSE OUR POSITIONS!

ZA
ZA
ZA

THANK YOU.
IEYASU-SAMA, CONGRATULATIONS ON YOUR SUCCESS IN TAKING KAKEGAWA! PLEASE EXCUSE US FOR NOT DISMOUNTING. WE'RE ON PATROL.


ZA
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FLY TO THE OPPOSITE BANK AND MAKE A PINCER FORMATION!
YAHHHHH
CATCH THEM!
GOD-DAMMIT!! TURN AROUND!

うおー
UOHHH
うお
UOHHH
KILL IEYASU!
CHARGE!

WAHHHH
YAHHH
YAHHHH
WAHHH

HONDA FORCES TOO!
HOLD OUT JUST A LITTLE LONGER!
HIRAIWA FORCES ARE COMING!
PULL BACK!
PULL BACK!

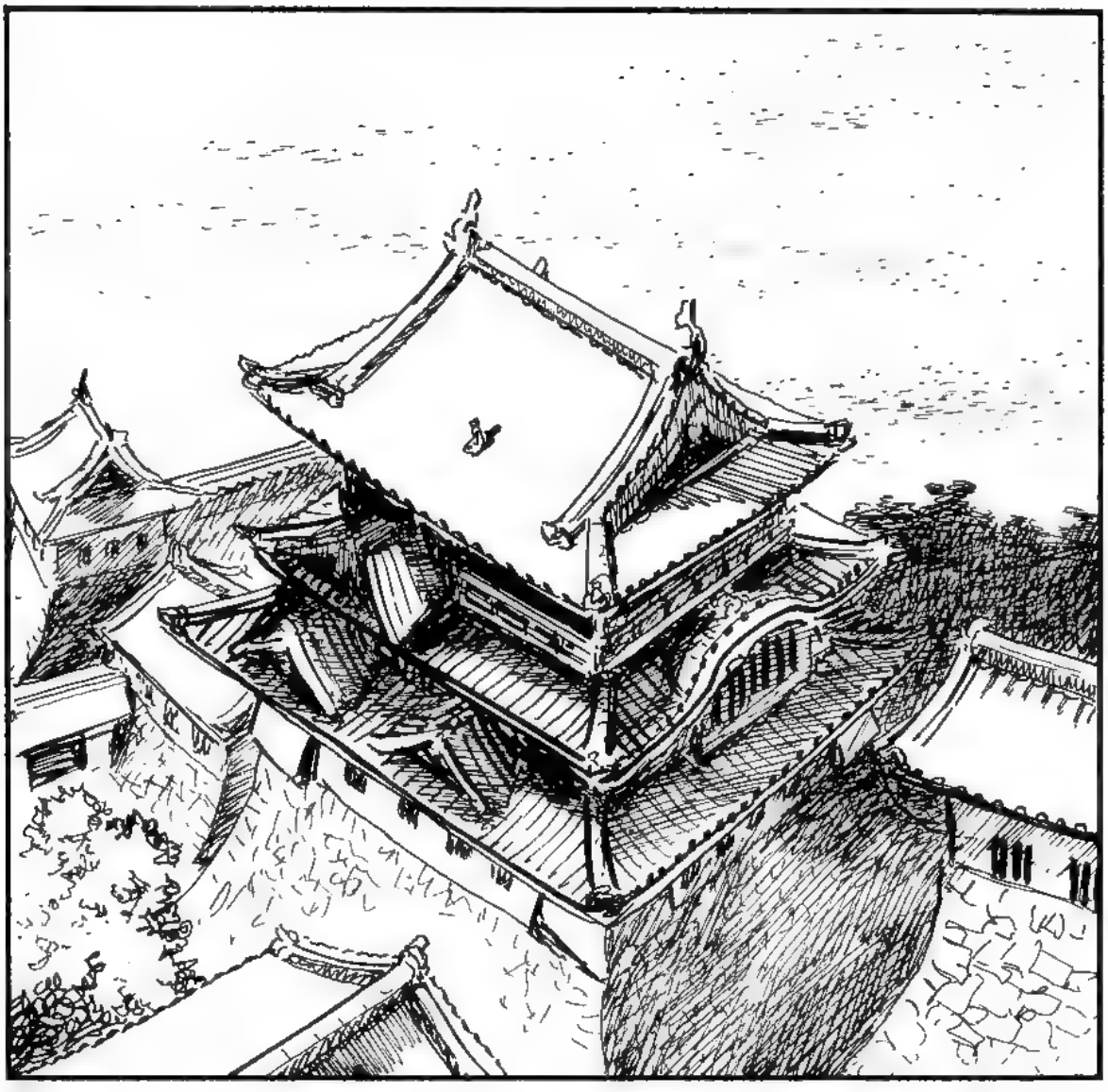
EVEN A LIE CAN BE GOOD SOMETIMES, AS THEY SAY.

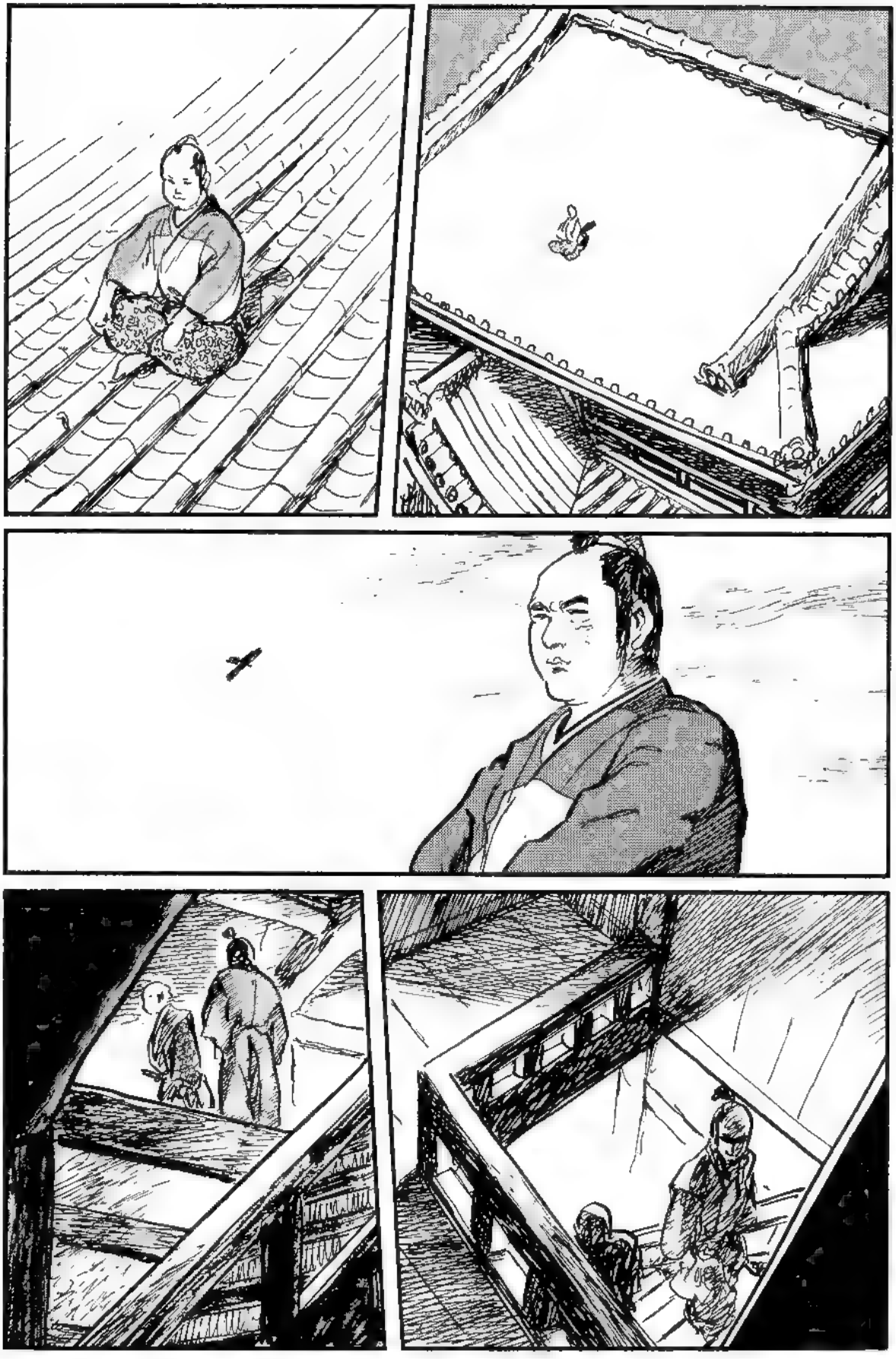
風徐如林侵
火不動如山
MMG! SHINGEN'S MAIN FORCE WAS HERE TOO!!
WHA...? WHY ARE THEY BACKING OUT?!

RIGHT AFTER WE WON THE SURRENDER OF KAKEGAWA... HE KNEW OUR DEFENSES WOULD BE LAX...
TA...TAKEDA SHINGEN. HOW FEARSOME.
INDEED! IT'S *THEM!*
IT'S... IT'S BOTH HIRAIWA AND HONDA FORCES!

I'LL GO PEE.
ANYHOW, THANK GOD YOSHICHIKA AND HEIHACHIRŌ CAME...
WE WERE CAUGHT NAPPING. THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT HAPPENED.

HANZŌ, LOOK. MY URINE IS BLOODY RED NOW.
IT PROVES MY HEART FROZE.
MY LIE CAME TRUE.
THAT WAS A CLOSE CALL...
AH HA HA HA HA.



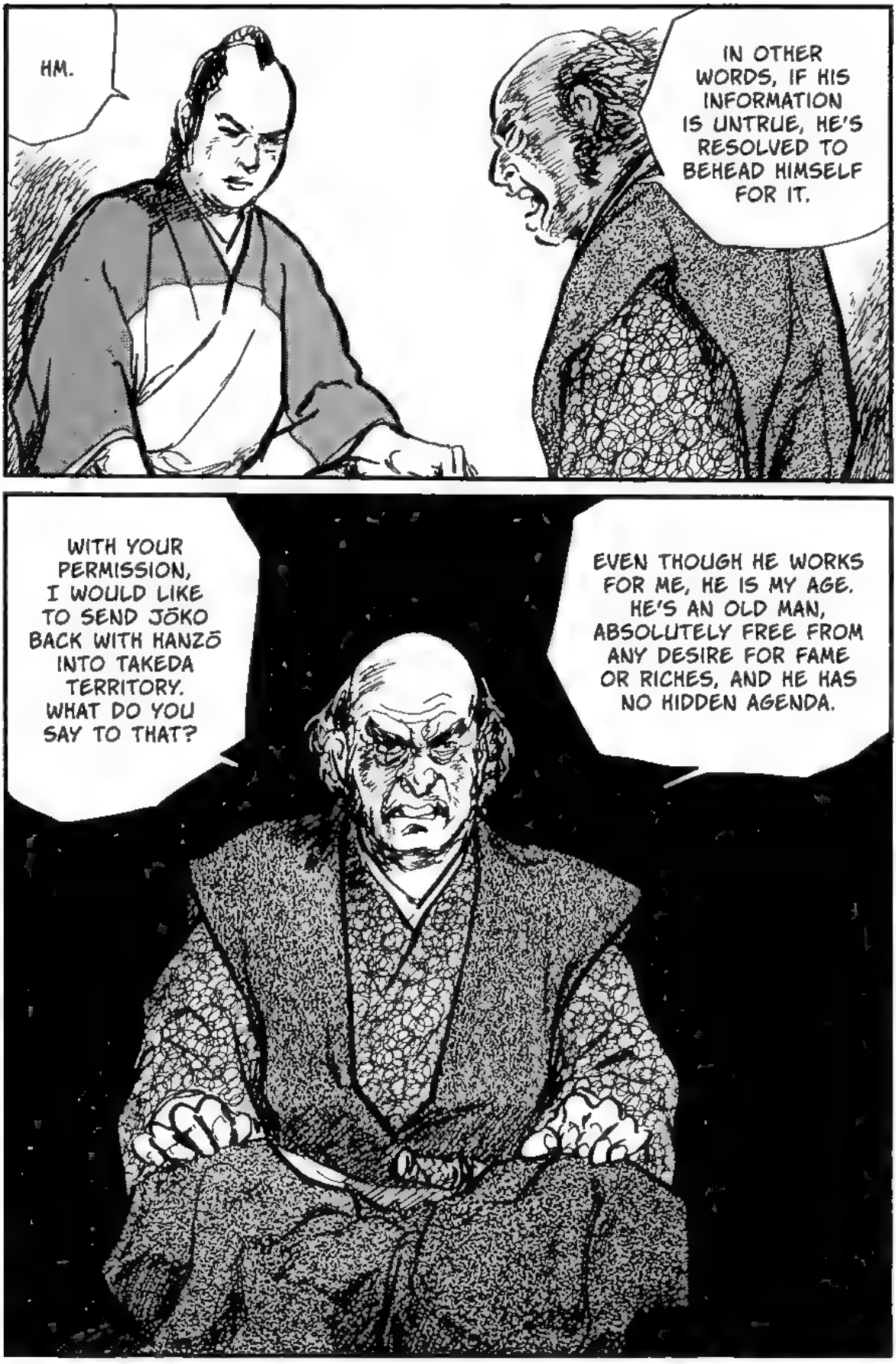


MILORD ?!
MI- LORD?
I'M UP HERE.
M... MI- LORD!!

I MEAN, I'M NOT TALKING ABOUT ME BUT YOU, MILORD!
NOT GOOD AT ALL!
OH, JŌKAN! SO YOU'RE WELL AGAIN NOW?
UP ON THE ROOF OF THE DONJON...? WHAT THE...?
IT'S NOT OKAY!!
IT'S OKAY. DON'T WORRY.
CALM YOUR-SELF!
YOU TOOK OVER MIKAWA, BROUGHT TŌTŌMI UNDER YOUR CONTROL, AND NOW, FINALLY, YOU'LL BE COMMANDING GREAT INFLUENCE OVER THE NEIGHBORING PROVINCES! IT'S A CRITICAL TIME FOR YOU TO BE--

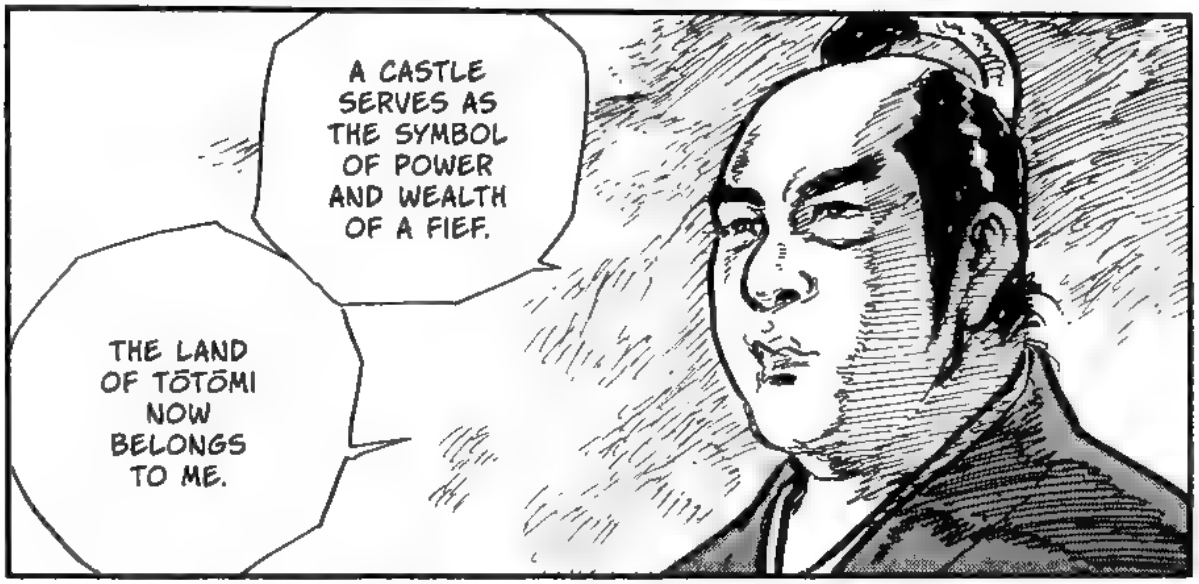
THAT'S THE THING!
WHAT'S UP ANYWAY, WITH FATHER AND SON TOGETHER?
HE REPORTS THAT TAKEDA SHINGEN HID AN ENORMOUS AMOUNT OF GOLD BEFORE HE SET OUT TO INVADE IMAGAWA.
ONE OF THE SPIES WE SET LOOSE IN TAKEDA TERRITORY HAS JUST RETURNED AFTER TWO YEARS.
WHAT?!

GOSO
KAGASA
YOU SURE IT'S NOT A HOAX?
IS IT TRUE?
IN A BAMBOO GROVE ABOUT TWO LI NORTH FROM YASHAJIN PASS.
RIGHT AROUND HERE.
WE CALL THE OPERATIVE NECK READY JŌKO. HE RETURNS WITH SECRET INFORMATION, ALWAYS PREPARED TO STICK HIS NECK OUT IF ANYTHING GOES WRONG.


HM.
IN OTHER WORDS, IF HIS INFORMATION IS UNTRUE, HE'S RESOLVED TO BEHEAD HIMSELF FOR IT.
WITH YOUR PERMISSION, I WOULD LIKE TO SEND JŌKO BACK WITH HANZŌ INTO TAKEDA TERRITORY. WHAT DO YOU SAY TO THAT?
EVEN THOUGH HE WORKS FOR ME, HE IS MY AGE. HE'S AN OLD MAN, ABSOLUTELY FREE FROM ANY DESIRE FOR FAME OR RICHES, AND HE HAS NO HIDDEN AGENDA.

...AND I'D ALSO FEEL LESS THREAT-ENED.
IF WE PILLAGED IT, I COULD DELIVER A SEVERE BLOW TO HIM...
TAKEDA'S WAR CHEST, HUH? HOW COULD SHINGEN...
BUT THE RISK IS TOO BIG.
WE'LL SEND THEM RIGHT AWAY.
I WON'T FALL OVER SO EASILY.
DO NOT WORRY.
NO AMOUNT OF GOLD IS WORTH HANZŌ'S LIFE.

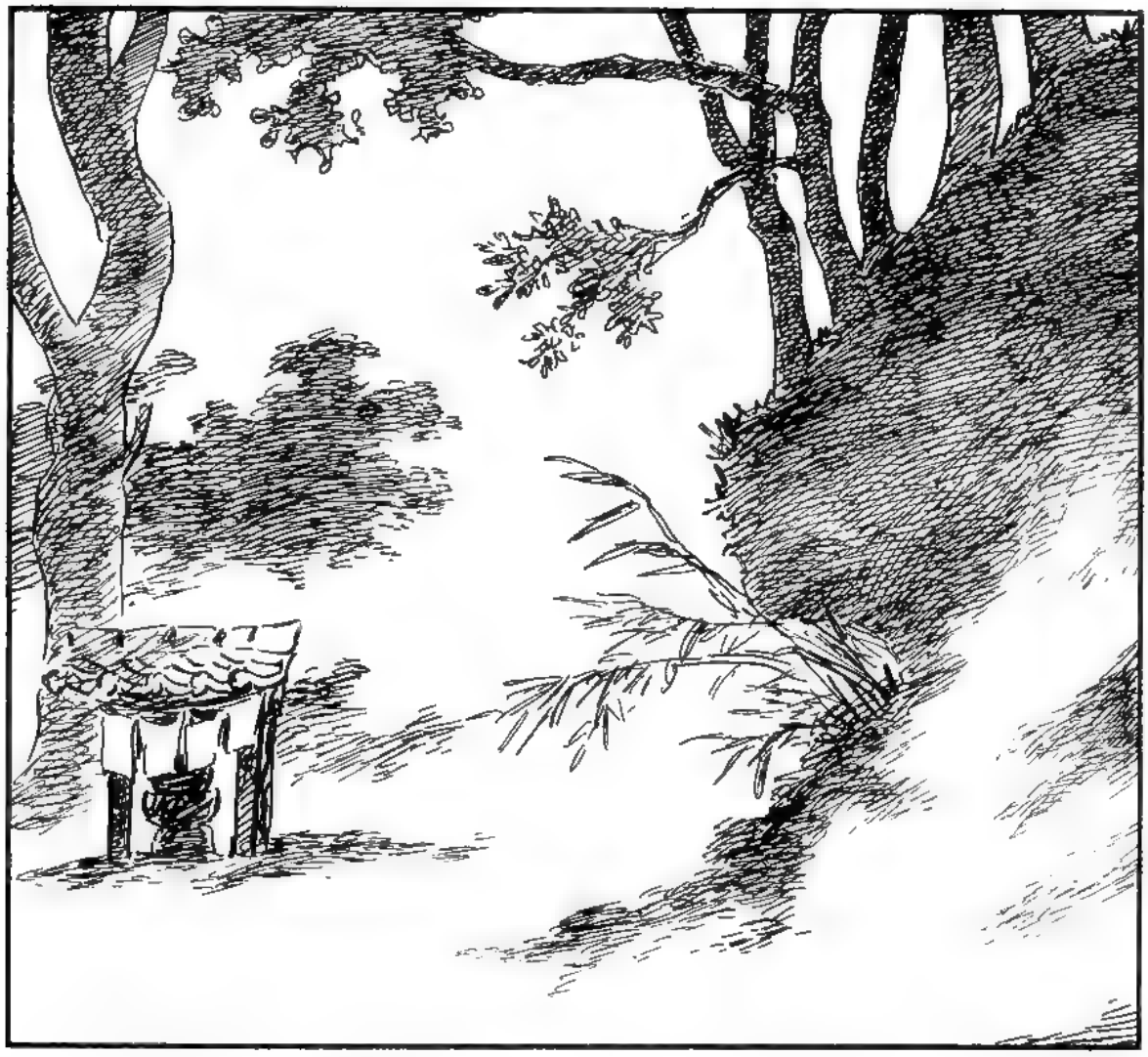
IT'S MY FIRST TIME. I CAN HARDLY EXPRESS THIS PERPLEXING EMOTION IN WORDS.
WHAT A STRANGE FEELING IT IS TO WIN THE SURRENDER OF A CASTLE.


A CASTLE SERVES AS THE SYMBOL OF POWER AND WEALTH OF A FIEF.
THE LAND OF TŌTŌMI NOW BELONGS TO ME.

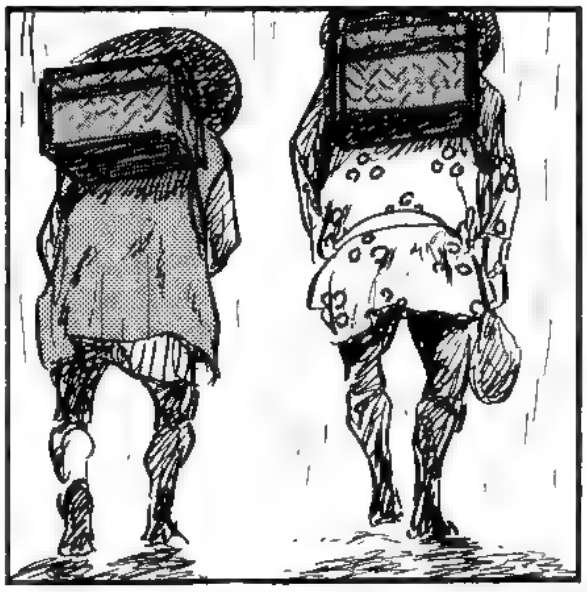
INDEED, I AM EXTREMELY SATISFIED.
HOW GREAT IT FEELS!

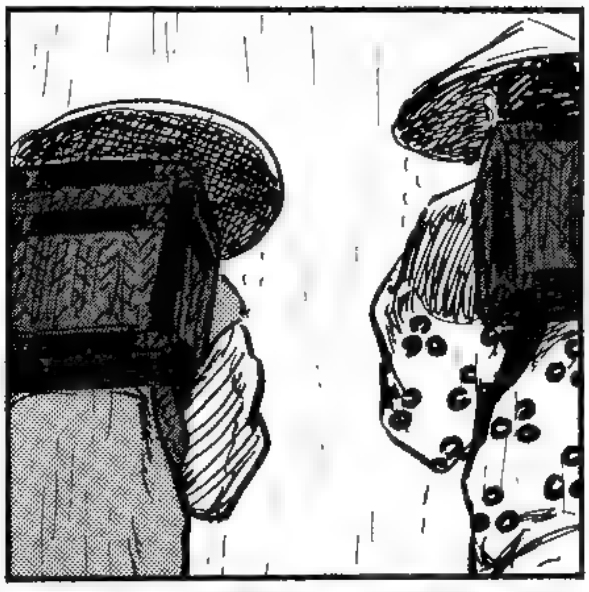
BY THE DESIRE TO TASTE THE SAME FEELING OVER AND OVER.
I'M ALSO TERRIFIED...
BUT...
THEY SAY HUMAN GREED KNOWS NO LIMIT. IT CERTAINLY IS THE TRUTH.
I'M AFRAID OF HOW I FEEL.
NOBUNAGA-*DONO*, HIDEYOSHI-*DONO* AND SHINGEN-*DONO* ALIKE...
WHAT'S MORE, I FEAR EVERYONE ELSE FEELS THE SAME WAY.

TEN MORE STEPS AND I'D FALL OFF THE EDGE, YOU SEE.
I GOT UP HERE ON THE ROOF, THINKING I'D BETTER ADMONISH MYSELF.
IT'S GOOD TO MOVE FORWARD, BUT IF I'M NOT MINDFUL OF WHERE I AM, IT WILL BRING MY DOWNFALL.
YES SIR!
SO BE VERY CAREFUL.
GETTING THE GOLD ISN'T BAD, BUT IF YOU END UP DEAD, IT MEANS NOTHING.



NO.
DOES SOMETHING BOTHER YOU, YOUNG MASTER?





YOUNG MASTER, HOW DO YOU THINK SHINGEN CONCEALED HIS GOLD IN A BAMBOO GROVE?

MELTED GOLD WAS PROBABLY POURED THROUGH A SMALL HOLE MADE IN THE SEGMENTS CLOSE TO THE ROOTS.
YOU ARE THE BEST OF IGA, INDEED. I BELIEVE SO TOO.
PROB-ABLY IN THE BAMBOO ITSELF.
MY TURN TO KEEP WATCH FOR AN HOUR!
IT'S PERFECT AND CRAFTY, JUST LIKE SHINGEN.
WHEN PEOPLE CUT BAMBOO, THEY USUALLY CHOP AROUND THE THIRD SEGMENT UP FROM THE GROUND. THE GOLD IS HIDDEN WITHOUT KILLING THE BAMBOO AND WITHOUT DRAWING ANY ATTENTION.

ZA
ZA
ZA
ZA
ZA
ZA
ZA
ZA
ZA
ZA

TUCE
TUCE
TUCE

DID YOU BRING HANZŌ, THE BEST OF IGA?
WITHOUT FAIL.

HE'S IN A HUT BY THE HILL.
HE'LL BE HERE AT THE CRACK OF DAWN.
WE... MADE A DEAL.
NOW... PAY ME.

ZAAA
ZAAA
AW... AHH.
THIS... IS TOO GOOD! I'VE... I'VE NEVER... TASTED A BODY... LIKE YOURS... BEFORE.
ZAAA
ZAAA
EVERY TIME, FIRE BURSTS THROUGH MY HEAD.

ZA
ZA
ZA
UHHH!!
OOH
ZA
DAMN GOOD!
IT'S... IT'S GOOD. SO GOOD.
ZA
ZA
ZA
ZA

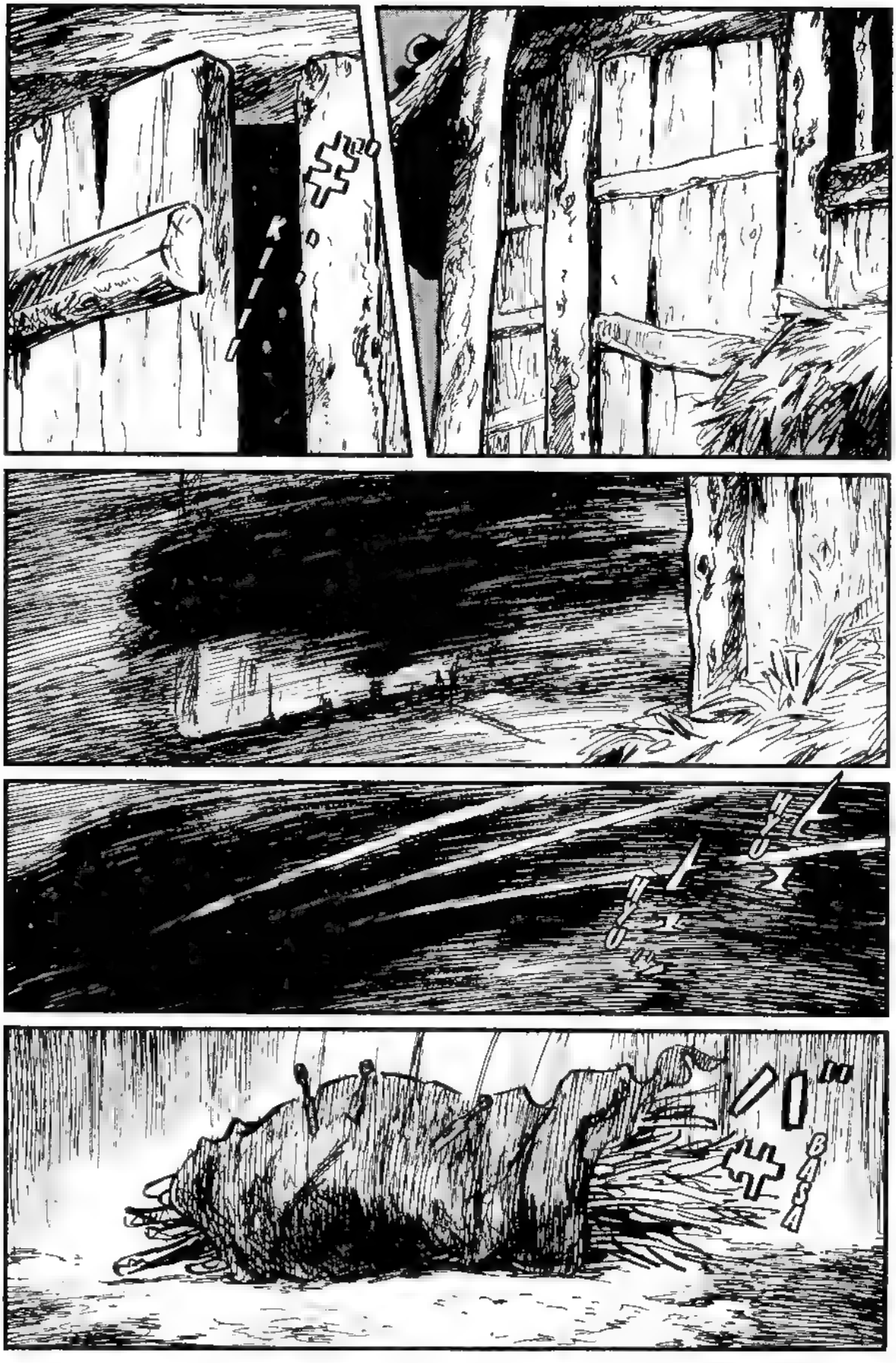
CHINK
YOUR SHIFT, YOUNG MASTER.
THE MORNING WE LEFT TOGETHER, I NOTICED A LONG, BLACK HAIR ON YOUR HAT.
IT WAS STUCK THERE, EN-TANGLED.

ME? I'M EMANCIPATED FROM ALL WORLDLY DESIRES!
THAT'S ABSURD!
YOU'VE CHANGED.
IT'S WITHIN YOU AS LONG AS YOU LIVE. THAT'S WHY THAT BLACK HAIR WEIGHS ON ME.
EVEN IF YOU DON'T SEEK FAME OR MONEY, YOU CAN'T ESCAPE MAN'S INSTINCT.
MMGH.
OTHER-WISE I CAN'T WORK WITH YOU.
PIERCE YOUR LEFT HAND!

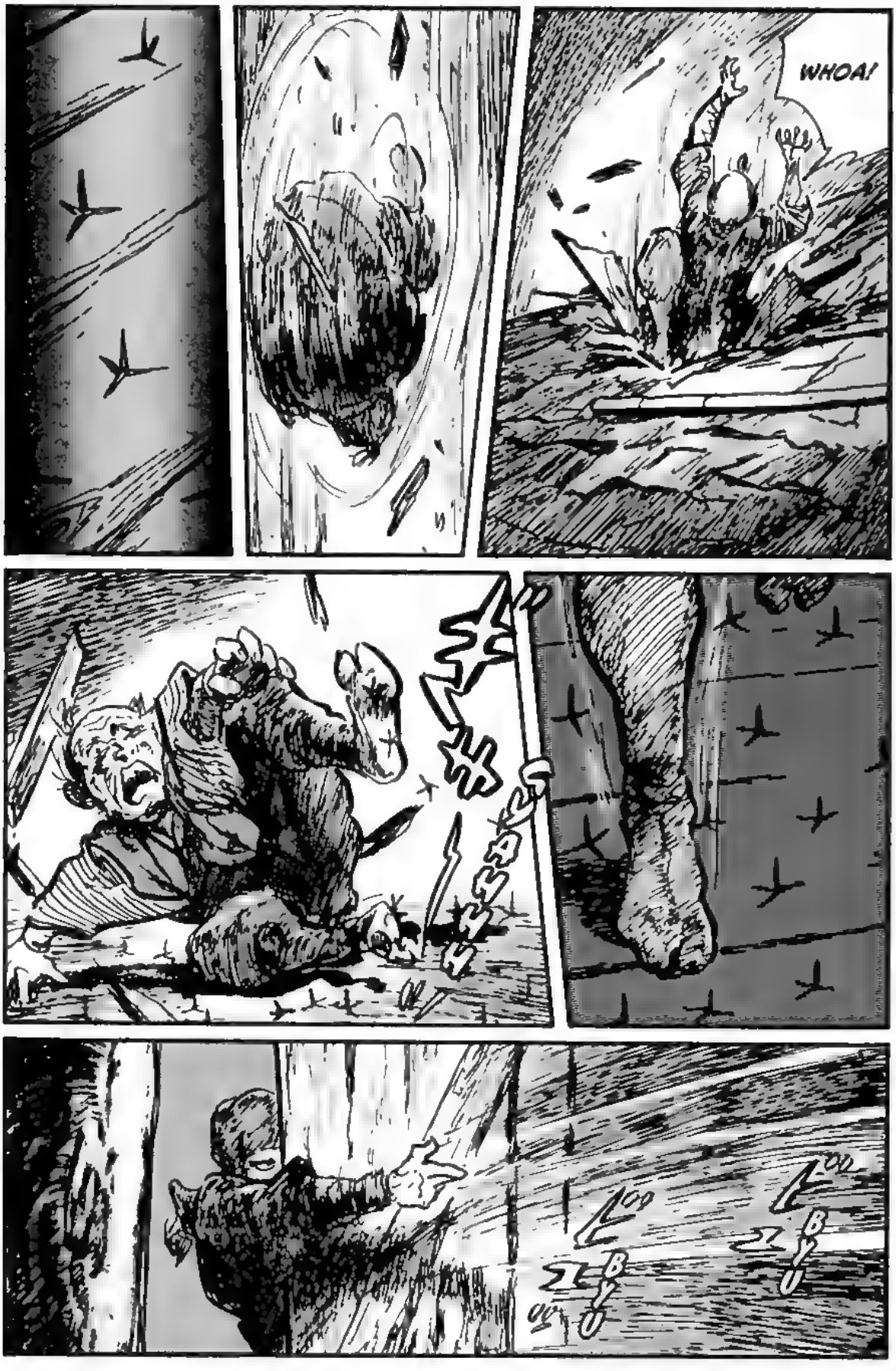
YOU WOULDN'T HAVE HESITATED OR GROANED.
IF YOU WERE STILL THE MAN I KNEW, YOU WOULD'VE DONE IT BEFORE I SAID ANYTHING ELSE, WITHOUT ARGUMENT.
IT'S A WOMAN, THEN.
URRGH!

HOW... HOW DARE YOU!!
A SUPPA ATTACHED TO WORLDLY DESIRES IS UGLY.
I WILL TAKE YOUR LIFE, YOUNG MASTER! I MEAN... HANZŌ!!

HOO
HOO


BASA

MERE CHILD'S PLAY.
HMPH. HE'S CLINGING TO THE DOOR.
DIE!


WHOA!

UGH!

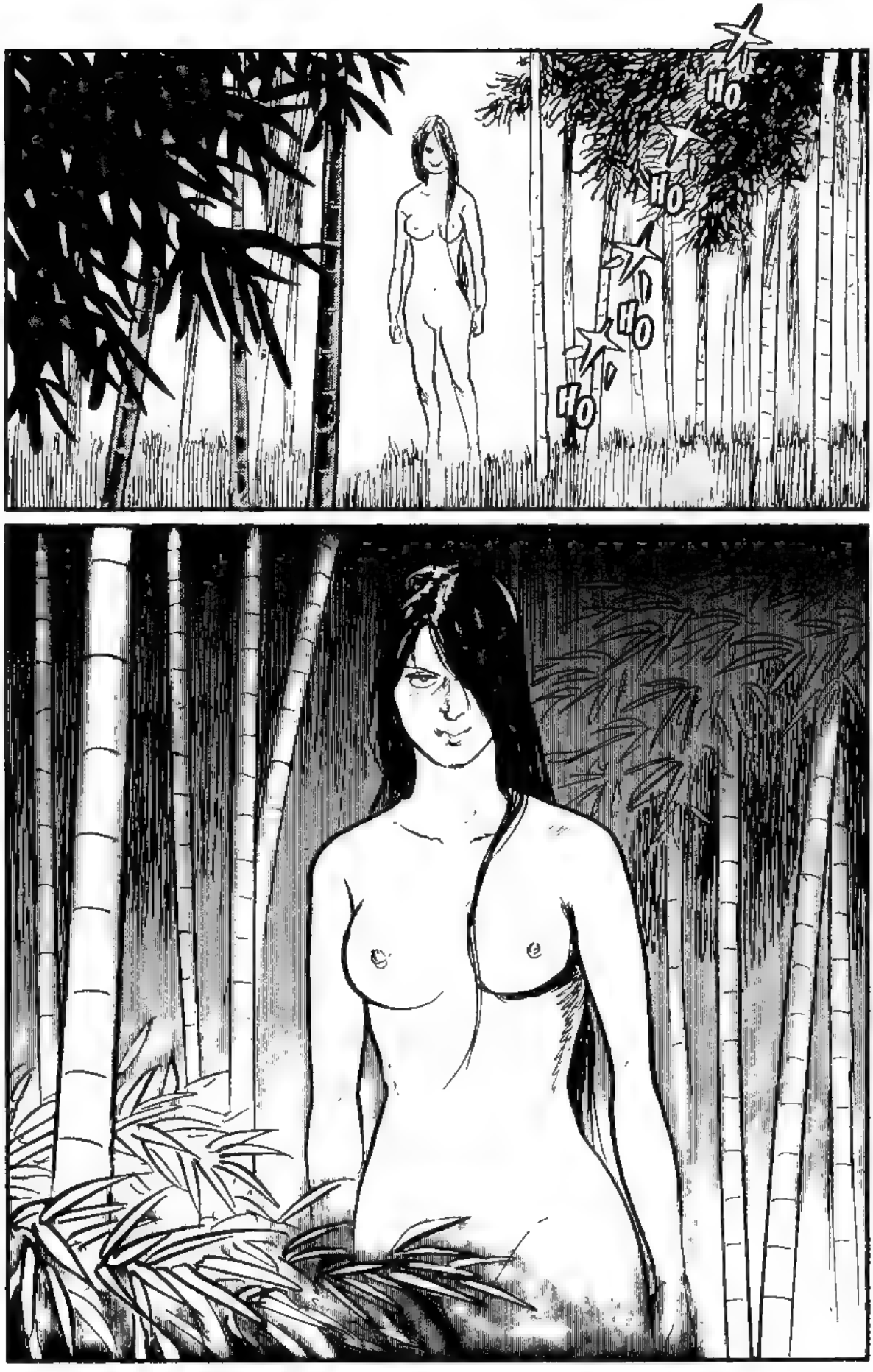
YE...AH...
THE GOLD. IS IT REALLY THERE?!
YOUNG MASTER, YOU SHOULD TASTE HER BODY. IT'S OUT OF THIS WORLD. YOU'LL FEEL A RUSH OF FIRE IN YOUR HEAD.
BUT... A TAKEDA *SUPPA* IS GUARDING IT... HER NAME IS KURONAMI... HEH HEH...
IS THERE GOLD... OR NOT?
THE FIRE...
KURONAMI ....?!
HOW COULD A WORTHY MAN LIKE HIM...

THERE'S PROBABLY NO GOLD.
IF KURONAMI IS THERE...IF ANYONE'S THERE AT ALL, IT'S POINTLESS. IF THE GOLD NEEDED A KEEPER, THERE'D BE NO POINT IN HIDING IT IN THE BAMBOO.
IF THERE WAS, NO ONE SHOULD BE GUARDING IT.
BETTER GO HOME AND TAKE THE OLD MAN'S BONES WITH ME...

IT WAS JŌKO WHO TOLD US ABOUT SHINGEN'S CACHE.
BUT WHY A GUARD... WHEN THERE'S NO TREASURE?
IT WAS ALSO JŌKO WHO BETRAYED US TO ASSIST THIS WOMAN CALLED KURONAMI.
DID SHE DO ALL THIS TO LURE ME OUT?!
MM...
WHAT DOES SHE REALLY WANT...?
IF THERE'S NO GOLD, WHY DID SHE GO TO SO MUCH TROUBLE?
SHE'S AFTER MY LIFE!
THAT'S IT!

KURONAMI MUST HAVE SOME PERSONAL GRUDGE.

I CAN'T HAVE ANOTHER MAN TURN OUT LIKE JŌKO.
IF I LEAVE NOW, WHO KNOWS WHAT NEW TRAP SHE'LL LAY.
SO YOU'VE COME, HANZŌ. I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR YOU.


HO
HO
HO
HO

GLOSSARY

Akiyama Nobutomo
(1531–1575) A retainer in the service of the Takeda family who served under Takeda Shingen and Takeda Katsuyori.

ayakashi
A mask used in *noh* theater that represents a vindictive or violent ghost, god, or powerful warrior.

daimyo
Feudal lords

fuchū
A provincial capital; the seat of a local government; a provincial office.

furinkazan
Literally "wind, forest, fire, and mountain." It was the battle flag used by Takeda Shingen, quoting the art of war. "Move as swift as a wind, stay as silent as the forest, attack fierce like fire, unmovable defense like a mountain."

guiqulai
From the famous poem of Tao Yuanming, one of the most influential pre Tang dynasty Chinese poets. It translates to "homecoming" or "returning home."

Hiraiwa Chikayoshi
(1542–1611) A trusted retainer under Tokugawa Ieyasu. It is known that Chikayoshi was a tutor to the eldest son of Ieyasu, Matsuraida Nobuyasu

Hōjō Ujimasa
(1538–1590) The fourth head of the late Hōjō clan, and *daimyo* of Odawara.

Hōjō Ujiyasu
(1515–1571) The son of Hōjō Ujitsuna and a great *daimyō* of the Odawara Hōjō clan.

hōmyō
A Buddhist name. A kind of rank in the Buddhist temple.

Honda Heihachirō Tadakatsu
Also called Honda Heihachiro, is generally regarded as one of Tokugawa Ieyasu's finest generals, and he fought in almost all of his master's major battles

honorifics
Japan is a class and status society, and proper forms of address are critical. Common markers of respect are the prefixes *o* and *go*, and a wide range of suffixes. Some of the suffixes you will encounter in *Path of the Assassin*.
dono – archaic; used for higher-ranked or highly respected figures
san – the most common, used among equals or near-equals
sama – used for superiors. Sometimes spoken as "saa."
sensei – used for teachers, masters, respected entertainers, and politicians

Igamono
"Men of Iga."

jizamurai
Literally "samurai of the land," "samurai of the soil." Jizamurai are rural samurai who often lived close to the land and were not entirely removed from the peasantry

Kakegawa
A river that runs through the west part of Shizuoka prefecture. It is also the name of a city located in Shizuoka prefecture.

Kofu
A city in Kai province (today's Yamanachi prefecture).

Lake Hamana
A lake situated in the western part of Shizuoka prefecture (formerly Totomi), on the border with Aichi prefecture.

measurement
1 *kan* = 8.27 lb,
200 *kan* = 1,653.47 lb.
6 *monme* = 0.79 oz.
1 *li* = 3.927 kilometers

Mt. Tennō
A mountain facing the Otokoyama (literally "man's mountain") across the Yodo river. Commanding the routes out of the Kyoto basin, this was a strategically important mountain in military terms and also for transport. Often referred to in popular speech as "tennozan."

nokizaru
Ninja.

Ōi river
A river in Shizuoka prefecture. It once formed the border between Tōtōmi and Suruga provinces.

Okudaira Sadakatsu
The son of Okudaira Sadamasa and the father of Okudaira Sadayoshi.

onriedo
The text of a sutra, meaning "Leave the depraved land. Pursue the peaceful world."

oyakata
A term used to address the head of the clan by the clan members. It translates to "house lord."

saisaku
Ninja spy / ninja spies.

Sekinen Hachiya
The first son of Ihoro Sekinen, who started the Hachiya clan. Every successor also used the same name Hachiya Kakubei Sekinen.

suppa/shinobi
Ninja.

Suwa clan
The Suwa clan of the Shinano province had more or less unknown ancestors. Even though this is true, many believe that the Suwa clan is descended from Minamoto Tsunetomo. During the middle of the sixteenth century, the Suwa were defeated the Takeda but later went on as vassals under them.

Takeda Nobutoyo
A son of Takeda Nobushige, who was a younger brother of Takeda Shingen. In other words, Nobutoyo was Shingen's nephew.

Takeda Yoshinobu
The eldest son and heir of Takeda Shingen.

Tōkai region
A subregion of Chubu, Japan along the Pacific Ocean. The name comes from Tōkaido, one of the Edo five routes.

Tōtomi province
An old province in the area of Japan that is today western Shizuoka prefecture.

umeboshi
A salty, tart condiment made from pickled Japanese plums.

Yamagata Masakage
(1524–1575) One of the twenty-four generals of the Takeda clan, he was famous for his red armor and skill on the battlefield.

KAZUO KOIKE

Though widely respected as a powerful writer of graphic fiction, Kazuo Koike has spent a lifetime reaching beyond the bounds of the comics medium. Aside from co-creating and writing such classic manga as *Lone Wolf and Cub* and *Crying Freeman*, Koike has hosted the popular *Shibi Golf Weekly* instructional television program; founded the *Albatross View* golf magazine; produced movies; written popular fiction, poetry, and screenplays; and mentored some of Japan's best manga talent.

Koike started the *Gekiga Sonjuku*, a college course aimed at helping talented writers and artists—such as *Ranma 1/2* creator Rumiko Takahashi—break into the comics field. His methods and teachings continue to influence new generations of manga creators, not to mention artists and writers around the world. Examples of Koike's influence range from the comics works of Frank Miller and Stan Sakai to the films of Quentin Tarantino.

The driving focus of Koike's narrative is character development, and his commitment to the character is clear: "Comics are carried by characters. If a character is well-created, the comic becomes a hit." Kazuo Koike's continued success in comics and literature has proven this philosophy true.

Kazuo Koike continues to work in the entertainment media to this very day, consistently diversifying his work and forging new paths across the rough roads of Edo-period history and the green swaths of today's golfing world.

GOSEKI KOJIMA

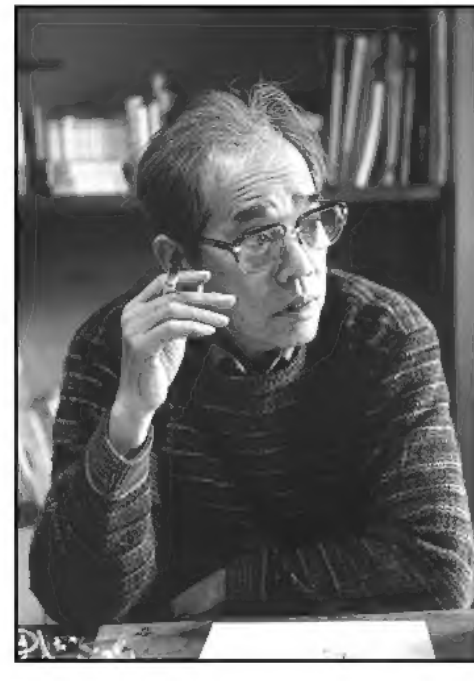
Goseki Kojima was born on November 3, 1928, the very same day as the godfather of Japanese comics, Osamu Tezuka. Art was a Kojima family tradition, his own father an amateur portrait artist and his great-great-grandfather a sculptor.

In 1950, Kojima moved to Tokyo, where the postwar devastation had given rise to special manga forms for audiences too poor to buy the new manga magazines just starting to reach the newsstands. Kojima created art for *kami-shibai*, or "paper-play" narrators, who would use manga story sheets to present narrated street plays, and later moved on to creating works for the *kashi-bon* market, bookstores that rented out books, magazines, and manga to mostly low-income readers.

In 1967, Kojima broke into the magazine market with his ninja adventure, *Dojinki*. As the manga magazine market grew and diversified, he turned out a steady stream of popular samurai manga series.

In 1970, in collaboration with Kazuo Koike, Kojima began the work that would seal his reputation, *Kozure Okami* (*Lone Wolf and Cub*). Many additional series would follow, including *Path of the Assassin* and *Samurai Executioner*.

In his final years, Kojima turned to creating original graphic novels based on the movies of his favorite director, the great Akira Kurosawa. Kojima passed away on January 5, 2000 at the age of seventy-one.



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The fighting clans of pre-Tokugawa Japan are gathering their arms and are on the move. Classic historical warlords, such as Takeda Shingen, Oda Nobunaga, and a young Ieyasu Tokugawa himself take the field in this quasi-historical graphic novel series, *Path of the Assassin*.

This volume of Kazuo Koike and Goseki Kojima's rich series finds Ieyasu both fighting for his life and looking to the future. First, a couple of eerie and mysterious ninja try to take his life, but find themselves foiled by the increasingly able Hattori Hanzo. And then a nation's tribes face off and spin through intrigue and tactical webworks, all while fascinatingly dark ninja politics weave subtext and sexy action throughout the masterly drafted pages.

Combining the best of these two great creators' talents, and with the history of a great nation providing the backdrop, *Path of the Assassin* is a series to collect and read many times.

Lifelong Friends, with the Same Dreams, Striving to Grow into a Rising River.

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